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OR,
CRUSHING A SERPENT'S HEAD.

The Romance of a Double Trouble.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "GILBERT OF GOTHAM," "OLD RID-
DLES, THE ROCKY RANGER," "TWILIGHT
CHARLIE, THE ROAD SPORT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
A HEINOUS CRIME.

A DARK, dreary, dismal night.
It had been raining—even yet a few drops were falling, and the streets of Gotham were in their worst condition.

Mud ruled supreme. Nothing escaped its mucky touch. Horses and vehicles were covered with it, and pedestrians were more or less bespattered.

It was a night in early autumn. The hour was not late, but it is safe to assume that few persons were abroad for pleasure. Those who were out were pushing along at swift pace, as though eager to reach their homes, elbowing one another without ceremony or regard for others' rights.

"YOU ARE A TRUMP!" EXCLAIMED THE ROGUE'S TERROR, SLAPPING THE BEDRAGGLED PAUL ON THE BACK.
"I OWE MY LIFE TO YOU, AND I SHALL NOT FORGET IT. MORE THAN THAT, I AM GOING TO ADD
ANOTHER TITLE TO YOUR NAME. ALLOW ME, PRINCE, TO KNIGHT YOU THE POSTMAN DETECTIVE!"

Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.

To those whose business compelled them to be out, it was doubly disagreeable, and did not tend to create in them a happy frame of mind; but still there was one, even of this class, upon whom it did not seem to have any depressing influence, for, as he hastened along, he was whistling a merry tune.

This one was a postman, or letter-carrier.

He was a young man about twenty-six years of age, clad in the prescribed uniform of bluish gray, of course, and wearing the regulation hat. But now his raiment looked considerably the worse for wear. His boots and trowsers were sadly tarnished with the spattering mud, and even his coat had not escaped the same plebeian defilement. But he seemed to care little for that. He hustled on, dodging into a shop here, diving down into a basement there, tripping lightly up the steps of a house yonder, and occasionally the sharp, shrill note of his whistle would be heard above every other sound.

He was a handsome young fellow, with large, clear, steel-blue eyes, a graceful mustache, and teeth of pearly whiteness. His complexion was clear and healthful, his face full and rounded, with strongly-marked features, and his hair of a very dark shade of brown was inclined to curl. He was about of medium height, and certainly nothing under the medium in weight, for he was compactly built and strong of limb.

This was Paul Boothman. Smart, active, cool-headed and intrepid, he was well named by his brother carriers—"Prince Paul."

"I believe I am a little later than usual to-night," he remarks to himself, as he plunges onward from place to place. "I must make all the haste I can, or Elna will be anxious about me. Bless her little heart! I believe she is the very best sister any fellow ever had. Hello! here is a letter for this house. It takes this woman full five minutes to open the door. Confound such people, I say! Every minute counts with me to-night."

Stopping short, he ran quickly up the steps, gave a vigorous tug at the bell, while his whistle sounded a note unusually long and loud.

He had to wait, as he expected; but at length the door was opened timidly about an inch, two fingers of a female's hand were put out, the letter was received, and the door was closed without delay.

The Prince had to smile as he hurried on.

"I am beginning to believe that that lone female is always in her night-dress," he commented. "She never opens the door any further, and I have never seen any more of her than just the two fingers. I must tell Elna about her. One letter for the third house ahead; then this bulky one for Uncle Horatio. I see it is from the other side of the ocean. He must have struck a new trail. I wonder how he is making out with his genealogy? It must hurt him like pulling teeth to pay postage on a letter to England," and he laughed at thought of it.

The carrier was on the east side of the city, on one of the many little streets that lie between Grand and East Houston, and was nearer the river than the Bowery.

Running nimbly up the steps of the "third house ahead," he made his presence known in the usual manner, and here he had not long to wait.

The door was quickly opened, the postman extended the letter, and a hand was put out as though to accept it; but, a most remarkable thing happened.

The hand that reached forth as though to take the letter, laid hold, with a vise-like grip, upon the wrist of the postman instead; and, before the Prince could realize what it meant, or offer the least resistance, he was jerked into the house and the door was closed behind him!

No one outside saw what was done. It was done so quickly that there was not the least noise to attract attention, and it happened that no pedestrian was near at the moment.

Paul found himself in a dimly lighted hall, confronted by two of the most villainous-looking men he had ever seen; and not only did they confront him, but they immediately threw themselves upon him.

Taken by surprise as he had been, the postman could offer no very effective resistance, though his assailants soon found that they had no boy to deal with.

The letters were instantly scattered over the floor, the bag dropped from the young man's shoulder, and he exerted all his strength to throw the rascals off. But they had the advantage.

In spite of their advantage, nevertheless, it looked for a moment as though they would lose their prey.

Paul Boothman was strong, and when he brought his strength to resist their attack it evidently was greater than they had expected. One of them was shaken off at once, and sent sprawling backward upon the stair-steps; but the other hung on, and before the postman could fairly exert himself against him, the other was upon him again.

The postman continued to struggle, and was still giving them all they wanted to do to overpower him, when a door opened and a third man appeared upon the scene.

This decided the struggle, in a moment. The third man caught the carrier from behind and pulled him backward, his hands gripping his throat and his knee pressing against his back, and the brave young fellow was in their power.

They bore him to the floor, and while two of them held him down, the other proceeded to gag him and bind his wrists.

This was soon done, and the Prince was helpless in their hands.

No outcry had been made, and very little noise, and no one outside of the four concerned knew anything about the dastardly deed.

"Did anybody see?" inquired one of the two who had led the assault.

"No," answered the one who had appeared upon the scene later, "no one was in sight, and the street was about deserted."

"Good! We have nothing to fear, then. It won't take us long to finish the work."

"No, we kin do it in short order, now," agreed the third.

The hapless postman was dragged back into the hall, where he was left lying while the men gathered up the scattered letters.

Paul's position was such as admitted of his seeing nearly all they did.

He watched them narrowly, studying their faces well in order that he might be sure of identifying them again, if he escaped with his life and ever had the opportunity of doing so.

The two ruffians who had first attacked him were the ones who gathered the letters up, and they handed them over to the man who had joined them later. This man looked them over one by one, finally putting one or more into his pocket—Paul could not be sure just how many. The rest were thrown into the bag carelessly, and the bag was pushed aside.

The unhappy carrier's thoughts were busy. Why had this attack been made upon him? Was it done for the purpose of robbing the mail only? Or had he enemies who desired to do him harm? He could not decide. When, however, he noticed that only a very few of the letters were taken, another idea came to him. Was there some particular reason why he had been thus dealt with? Was there some particular letter that these men wanted to get hold of? It looked that way, but he could not explain away the puzzling question. How could they have known he had such letter on this particular occasion?

These thoughts and many others ran through his mind, but he had not long to ponder over them, for, as soon as the men had done with the letters, they turned again to him.

"Now, my fine fellow," remarked the one who had pocketed the letter—or letters, "we will take care of you."

"An' what are ye goin' ter do with him?" inquired one of the others.

"Don't stop to ask questions," reproved his companion, "but lay hold of him with me and bring him along; you will see."

"Yes," directed the master-spirit of the trio, taking up a little lamp from a table where it had been standing, "pick him up and bring him along, and we will soon dispose of him."

The Prince could not truthfully have said that he felt like a prince at that moment. His worst fears were realized; they meant to take his life. But it was not of himself that he thought, but of his sister. He was her support and protector, and what would she do without him? She would wait and watch for him in vain, all night, but he would not come. Nor would he come on the morrow, or ever; and then—What then? The thought almost drove him mad.

The two men lifted him up with as little regard as though he had been a sack of papers, and, following their leader with the lamp, carried him along to the rear of the hall and down a flight of steps to the basement below.

There they turned, descended another flight of steps, and stopped in a damp and noisome hole that was not even worthy to be called a sub-cell.

Here they dropped him to the ground, and both looked to the third for further directions.

The man with the lamp stepped to the middle of the below-floors room, sounded the ground with his foot, and said:

"Here, take that shovel and remove the earth from over the trap, and open it for me."

One of the men took up a shovel that was standing near, and proceeded to follow out the directions.

When the shovel was forced into the ground it produced a hollow sound as it came in contact with wood, about six inches below the surface, and it did not take long to shovel the dirt away.

A trap door about four feet square was disclosed.

This was lifted up, by means of a piece of rusty chain that was secured to the top of it, and, as the man with the lamp held the light over the opening, a dark, dismal hole was disclosed to view, with steps leading down; and at the bottom of the steps, a broad, slimy platform—as it looked to be. In that platform was another hole, and in that a surface of water reflected the light.

"Put him in there," the man with the lamp ordered; "put him in head downward, and push him under the boards out of sight. He will never be seen again."

The Prince was dragged to the hole in the floor, was carried down to the floating platform below, and there, without even allowing him to say a last word, the two devils in human form thrust him, head-first, into the water, and pushed his body as far under the boards as they could reach. That done, they hurriedly made their retreat to the place above, shut down the door and covered it with earth as they had found it, and went on up to the rooms above the basement.

CHAPTER II.

HORATIO BOOTHMAN'S HOBBY.

"SELINA PEPPERTREE! Selina Peppertree!" The voice that called was naturally husky, and it had a squeak like a rusty hinge that added nothing to its melodiousness.

It was the voice of Horatio Boothman, the uncle to Paul Boothman, the postman; and whose name we have already learned from the young man.

Horatio Boothman was about fifty years of age, but he looked much older, for his head was completely bald, and his jaws were toothless. Not everybody knew these facts, however, for he usually wore a wig and false teeth. He was very spare, there being little of him but skin and bones. He wore a shiny suit of black that was much too large for him. The suit evidently had seen years of service, and had, undoubtedly, been made for him at a time when he had more flesh on his bones. He had withered up and receded from it like a dried kernel in a nutshell.

He was not rich, but was comfortably well-to-do; owning the house in which he lived, and having a small income that enabled him to live without work. He had never married, but had always had a housekeeper to keep his home, his clothes, and his table in order. He had been keeping house for twenty-five years, and had never had but one housekeeper, and that one was the Selina Peppertree whom we have just heard him call.

Selina Peppertree was about five years his junior, and was as good and faithful a body as one could wish to meet. But, she had her peculiarities, as the reader will discover.

Horatio Boothman had a hobby, and one that put idleness to flight. He was a genealogist, or at least aimed to be, so far as his own family was concerned; and his whole time was given to that interesting but exasperating work. He had been for more than ten years occupied with the task, and could not yet see the end of his labor. There were some knotty problems yet to be solved, that had many times driven him almost to the verge of despair. No wonder that he was bald, toothless, and older in appearance than he was in years.

The front room of his comfortable little house was used as his den, and he had it arranged to suit his taste. In the center front, between but a little distance away from the windows, was his table. On the right were his shelves of books. On the left-hand wall was a large frame of little compartments, or pigeon-holes. These were all labeled and numbered, and in them he kept his data concerning the different branches of the family and their many diverging twigs.

One other particular about him, and we will go on. He was rather miserly in everything. He made every penny do its duty, and never parted with one where it could be avoided. A story was told of him, for the truth of which we cannot vouch. It was said that at one period of his life he had had a habit of pasting old rags to the bottoms of his boots to save the soles. Whether this was true or not, it was an established fact that he sailed very close to the wind—so close, in fact, as some declared, that his sail was never quite full.

In response to his call for Selina Peppertree, a door was heard to open and shut, down in the basement, and a voice responded:

"Yes, Mr. Horatio!"

"Come up here, Selina Peppertree," requested Mr. Boothman; "I want you."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

The stairs gave an occasional creak; then a step was heard in the hall, the door of the room opened, and, Selina Peppertree stood in the presence of her employer.

She was about forty-five years of age, and looked neither older nor younger. She was plainly but primly dressed, and was neither good-looking nor bad looking. She was neither short nor tall, nor lean nor fat. In brief, she was a person of the happy "medium" sort in all respects. One article that went to compose her attire was a little old-fashioned, and did not in any measure detract from her primness. This was a thin, small shawl, which she wore over her shoulders, crossed over her breast, and pinned behind at the middle of her back.

As soon as she had entered the room she closed the door, and then faced her employer, her hands crossed in front at her waist.

"What is it, Mr. Horatio?" she inquired respectfully.

"Have you heard the postman?"

"No, Mr. Horatio."

The postman had grown to be one of the daily events in Horatio Boothman's life. Sometimes he brought important genealogical information, though oftener he did not; and whenever the hour of his coming drew near, it put the genealogist in a distressing state of feverish expectancy.

"It is strange that he does not come, Selina Peppertree; it is past his usual hour."

"I know it is, Mr. Horatio, and I have been waiting to hear him, ready to go to the door without delay."

This was true. The housekeeper knew Mr. Boothman's eagerness to get his letters promptly, and she never lost a moment in answering the postman's call. In truth, she was almost a part of himself. She assisted him in his work, and was, to a certain degree, interested in it.

"You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree; a good girl. That is all now. Be on hand for him when he comes. I do believe that rascally nephew of mine makes himself late on purpose when he has a letter for me. Haven't you noticed, Selina Peppertree, that when he has letters for me he is always a little late?"

"It has happened so several times, Mr. Horatio."

"To be sure it has. For a penny I would complain of him. I would, Selina Peppertree; I would complain of him for one penny."

Having said this, Mr. Boothman turned and began to pace the floor, and the housekeeper went out.

Their manner of addressing each other has been noticed, perhaps. The housekeeper always addressed her employer as Mr. Horatio; and he never addressed her in any other manner than by her full name. They never varied. She never said "yes, sir," or "no, sir;" she never said "Mr. Boothman." It was always "Mr. Horatio." He never said simply "Selina," but always "Selina Peppertree."

There was method in this. On his part it was a barrier against familiarity. On her part it was more. She loved the old Bach. She had been these many years trying to lead him to woo, win and marry her, but seemed to be no nearer success now than she had been twenty years ago. At first she had addressed him as "Mr. Boothman," and "sir," but when her heart began to warm toward him, she adopted the slightly more familiar and affectionate "Mr. Horatio." Using herself to this form of address, she reasoned, it would be very easy for her to drop the "Mr." when she became his wife.

Hers was a case of hope long deferred. But she had not by any means given up. She still loved, and was as ready to drop the "Mr." now as she had been years ago. But, from all appearances, their present fixed state of relationship as employer and servant was likely to go right on to the end of time.

She had been gone from the room only a few minutes, and Mr. Boothman had taken only a few turns around the apartment, when the postman's sharp, shrill whistle was heard.

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!"

A quick step in the hall; the door opened slightly; the housekeeper looked in and responded:

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"I hear him coming, Selina Peppertree."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio, I heard him too; I am ready, Mr. Horatio."

"You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree."

The door was closed, and the housekeeper took her place near the front door, to be ready to open it promptly; Mr. Boothman standing in the room in a listening attitude, almost holding his breath in his eagerness to hear the postman's foot upon the steps.

This took place three times every day but Sunday, and with but slight variations.

Once more the whistle was heard, this time nearer, but it was not heard again at all.

Fully five minutes Horatio Boothman waited, and then he could not wait any longer. His stock of patience was exhausted, and in his state of expectancy the strain upon his nerves was something awful.

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!" he called impatiently, his voice a little more husky and a little more squeaky than ever.

The quick step in the hall; the opening of the door slightly; the housekeeper looking in, and the response:

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"Selina Peppertree, where is that confounded postman?"

"I do not know, Mr. Horatio; I only heard his whistle once more. It is very strange, I think."

"It is just so strange, Selina Peppertree, that I am going to complain of that rascally nephew of mine. I believe he plays tricks with me, knowing how very important my letters are, and how anxious I am to get them. I shall complain, Selina Peppertree, just as sure as you are born. Have you looked out to see if you could catch sight of him?"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio, I looked out about a minute after he whistled the second time, but could see nothing of him. He must have gone on very fast."

"Selina Peppertree, I do not understand it. This is the first time, I guess, that we have not heard his whistle on both sides of our door, isn't it?"

"I would not wonder, Mr. Horatio."

"Then I say it is strange, mighty strange. But, I will see what it means, you just mark that, Selina Peppertree. I will see what it means. If that boy Paul is up to any of his tricks with me, I will punish him; you see if I don't."

"And serve him right, too. But, I do not think he would dare hold your letters over, Mr. Horatio. It must be that for once he has not had many letters for our street, and has run right along."

"May be so, Selina Peppertree, may be so. I will find out about that. Are you done with your work?"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"And do you want to help me a little while?"

"If you desire, Mr. Horatio."

"Very well, you may do so. Confound that postman, he has made me nervous. I must do something. Just pull Abraham twenty-nine and Moses seventy-eight out of their pigeon-holes, and bring them to the table. We will check up some dates. Confound that postman! There, that is right. You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree, a very good girl. You are a great help to me. I am going to make a will one of these days, Selina Peppertree."

The pair sat down, and for the present we leave them poring over the family records of past and gone generations.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER CRIME FOLLOWS.

"WHAT can it be that is keeping Paul?"

Pretty lips they were that framed the words.

The speaker was a young lady about twenty-two years of age. She was slender and graceful of form. She was plainly, but neatly and tastefully attired, and had about her an unconscious air of queenly grace.

This young lady was Elna Boothman, sister to the Prince.

We have described the Prince as handsome, and now we see that his sister was even more favored. She was beautiful. She looked very much like her brother, but in her the same stamp of features was doubly refined. A wealth of soft, glossy, dark-brown hair crowned her head, and her face was the picture of health.

They had a floor of four rooms in a quiet house on a respectable street, and Elna was the housekeeper.

Previously to their coming here they had lived with their uncle, Horatio, whose acquaintance we already have made.

A few words of explanation:

At the time of the great fire in Chicago, in 1871, their parents fell victims to the devouring element, and they were orphaned. Paul was then eight years old and his sister six. Nothing was saved to them but the scanty supply of clothes they happened to have on at the time. Their father had conducted them to a place of temporary safety, and had returned to bring their mother, who was sick in bed, when the awful sea of flame, running with race-horse speed, cut off his retreat, and he and his wife both perished.

The children were in an awful situation, but were no worse off than hundreds of others at that terrible period. They stood where their father had left them until the approaching heat drove them away, when they fell in with the tide of the begira and made their escape from the doomed city.

To tell the story of their suffering during the days that followed is not our purpose. When order began to rise out of chaos, and their case became known to the relief committee, steps were taken to find their relatives. The boy knew that he had an uncle in New York, and that his name was Horatio Boothman. The committee made inquiries, found the right man, and the children were handed over to him, and he was ordered to take care of them.

In his own way Horatio Boothman did his duty by the orphans. He put them under the care of his housekeeper, provided for them in the least expensive manner he could adopt, and gave them the advantage of the public schools. He did not see how he could do more than that.

When Paul left school his uncle found a situation for him in a store, but that did not suit the young man, and a few years later he made application for, and finally secured, a position as letter-carrier.

In the mean time their uncle had dipped into his genealogical research, and as the genealogical octopus wound its fascinating arms around him, his home grew less and less attractive for his nephew and niece.

Finally, about four years before the time of our romance, they took their leave of him, and began housekeeping on their own account.

It was a highly satisfactory arrangement all around. The uncle raised no objections whatever; Selina Peppertree greatly favored the scheme; and Paul and Elna were only too glad to get away from them.

We find Elna in her clean and cozy back

room, which answered the purposes of kitchen, dining-room and sitting-room all in one. The front room was their modest parlor, and between were their bedrooms.

The table was set, a pot of tea was steaming upon the stove, and two or three dishes were partly in the oven to keep their contents warm.

A clock on the mantel marked the hour of nine.

The pretty girl's face wore an anxious expression, and she had been through to the front room many times to look out to see if she could see her brother coming.

"What can it be that is keeping Paul?" she questioned, half-aloud, as she came back once more from the front room, after another fruitless look up and down the street. "He has seldom been later than half-past eight in getting home, and I am getting anxious about him. Where can he be? But, it has been an awful rainy day, and I suppose the mails are later than usual."

Reflecting thus, she sat down and took up some needlework, thus to occupy the time until her tardy brother arrived.

When she looked at the clock again it was half-past nine.

"What can be detaining him?" she fruitlessly interrogated, as she dropped her work and sprung to her feet. "He has never been away so late as this, and I am worried about him."

Once more she went into the front room and looked out.

He was not to be seen, and with excited and troubled mind she returned to the room in the rear.

"I do not know what to think about it," she reflected. "Here the supper will soon be unfit to eat, and I know I shall have to make fresh tea. I wonder that he did not send me word."

Pouring a cup of tea for herself, she sipped it, eating a piece of bread with it, and when she had done she tried to resume her sewing.

She soon had to give it up. She could now do nothing. It was near the hour of ten, and still her brother had not come.

Just as she was about to go into the front room again to look out, she heard the door of the lower hall open, and her face instantly beamed with gladness.

"He is here at last!" she joyfully exclaimed.

But, she was mistaken, as she instantly found. When the door closed, and steps were heard on the stairs, she knew it was not Prince, after all. Who could it be? She did not recognize the step.

On up the stairs the person came, and there was a rap at the door.

Trembling in her excitement, Elna rose and opened it.

A strange man stood before her.

The man took off his hat, made a slight bow, and as he did so inquired:

"Are you Miss Boothman?"

"That is my name," Elna answered.

"Then I am right," the man observed in a tone of satisfaction. "I have come here from your brother. He—"

"What has happened to my brother?" Elna demanded quickly; "tell me what has happened to him, sir."

"There, there, now, do not be alarmed," the man tried to reassure; "it is not serious. He has met with a slight accident, that is all."

"And where is he?"

"At the post-office, unless—"

"Unless what, sir? Oh! tell me, tell me all about it."

She was wringing her hands, and her face was blanched.

"First let me say again that it is nothing serious, nothing serious I assure you," the man hastened to say. "He has met with a little accident, and insisted upon our sending for you. We would have brought him home, but he was afraid the shock would be too much for you, and preferred to be taken to a hospital. It may be he is there by this time, and—"

"But, what has happened to him? Please tell me what has happened to him."

"I will tell you all about it, certainly: do not excite yourself so. It is not serious. There was a runaway; Paul was knocked down; his head was cut a little, and that is all there is to it. But, he wants you to come and see him. I suppose he wants you to know as soon as possible that he is safe, and that he will soon be all right."

"Are you telling me the whole truth? Is he not hurt much worse than you say?"

"I assure you that I am telling you the whole truth."

"And he is in no danger?"

"I do not see the least cause for alarm; but, you can soon see for yourself. Will you go?"

"Of course I will go! How can you think that I would refuse! I will be ready in a very few minutes."

"Very well; I will wait for you at the door."

The man turned and went down-stairs again, and Elna hastened into her private room to change her dress, and to put on heavier shoes and her hat and wrap.

In a very short time she was ready.

Turning the gas down low, she left the room and locked the door after her, and hastened down the stairs.

Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.

The man was waiting for her just outside the door. A carriage was standing near the curb.

"I have procured a carriage," the man said, "and we will go down in that."

For the first time, and in an instant, a suspicion flashed upon the girl's mind. Was everything all right?

She was prompt with her response.

"I prefer to take the Elevated," she returned.

A shadow of annoyance passed over the man's face.

"If you are suspicious," he said, "you may ride alone, and give your own directions to the driver. I will return by a street car. The carriage is your best conveyance. The streets are in a terrible condition."

Elna halted between two perplexities. One was the suspicion that had so suddenly come into her mind, and the other was the desire to reach her brother as soon as she could. Was the suspicion groundless? She felt abashed that she had let her thought become known, and tried to put it away; but at the same time, now that she had objected to the carriage, she felt she ought to hold to her decision.

And she did. The man was a total stranger to her, and to enter a carriage of his choosing would be to place herself in his power.

"I am sorry you have put yourself to the trouble of procuring a carriage," she said, "as I much prefer the railroad. It is only a block to the station."

"Well, take the carriage that far, then," the man insisted. "I shall have to pay for it anyhow, and you may as well get some benefit out of it."

"No, I prefer to walk," Elna insisted, and she started; "it will be no more trouble than getting in and out of the carriage."

"Well, if you insist upon it, all right; I will accompany you. John," to the driver of the carriage, "I shall not need you. I will pay you to-morrow."

This was said in a natural way, but in a tone that betrayed annoyance, and the young lady condemned herself more and more for her mean suspicion; but had she seen the signal that accompanied the words, she would have known that her fears were well founded.

"All right," the driver responded, "it's all th' same ter me," and he started on a walk in the same direction the young lady had taken.

A few strides brought the man up with Elna, and he walked along with her in silence at a respectful distance. But his manner soon changed. Suddenly he sprung to her side, threw his right arm around her and clapped his left hand over her mouth, and she was helpless in his grasp. The carriage drew up to the curb; another man jumped out; and in a moment of time the girl was thrust into the vehicle, and all were driven rapidly away.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE FOUNTAIN HEAD.

In one of the "Bohemian" quarters of the town was the studio of an engraver named Rogerton.

Jabez Rogerton was a man about fifty years of age. He was tall and gaunt, had an iron-gray beard that was cropped close to his face, and hair of about the same-color that rested upon his shoulders.

On the same evening of which the previous chapters treat, we find him alone in his "studio"—more properly den, pacing to and fro across the floor.

It was four long strides across, and four long strides back again, and looking at him one might have thought that he was making these four strides with the utmost care and precision, counting every one, so much attention did he seem to be giving to the innocent pastime.

Such a supposition, however, would have been far from the truth. His movements were purely mechanical, and his thoughts were occupied in another direction.

He had on a faded and much worn artist's jacket, and his hands were thrust deep into the pockets. The jacket, and also his vest, was thrown open, displaying an array of ruffled shirt-front that was not remarkable for its snowy whiteness. His feet were incased in a pair of yellow-leather slippers that were in their last stage of usefulness. His trowsers were growing a little short, and were sadly bagged at the knees.

"Confound the boy," we hear him mutter, "why don't he come? Here it is after nine, and no sign of him yet."

As he uttered these words, he jammed his hands still harder down into the pockets of the jacket, scowled at a little clock that stood on a shelf between the two windows of the room, and discharged a quantity of tobacco juice into a corner where the accumulated dirt of a year, seemingly, had been swept.

Making a sharp right-about-face movement at the end of the four strides in that direction, he started upon the returning four, scowling now at everything.

"What does he mean by such work? That is what I'd like to know. He ought to know that I will be anxious to see him. I am on needles to learn how matters have gone."

Making a sudden turn at the end of two

strides, he finished the number, and halted in front of one of the windows.

Here he stood for some time looking out.

What he could see did not enlighten him much concerning the person he was looking for. The street was one of the muddiest to be found, and on the opposite side was a slipping and slopping line of pedestrians. He could not see the pavement on the side he was on without raising the window, and he did not take the trouble to do that.

He watched the passers-by for some time, and then made another right-about-face, took two strides, wheeled right, and resumed his regular order of march.

His scowl was growing deeper, and he discharged his load of tobacco juice at the heap of dirt with greater force, while his hands burrowed down into the pockets of his jacket until there was danger that something would give way.

"I'll wring his neck when he does come, that is what I will do for him," he snapped out. "Here it is getting on to half-past nine, now, and no signs of him yet. I'll dust his jacket with my cane, the young whelp; I will, by thunder!"

His appearance went to indicate that he fully meant what he said.

Whom was he looking for? An office boy? That was hardly likely, for the office had no appearance of having ever seen such an article of furniture, unless it was one who was too lazy to make his mark with broom or window-rag.

"No, it was not likely that it was an office-boy. But, whom then?"

With more patience than Mr. Rogerton was showing, let us await the tardy comer's arrival, and so learn.

Patience was certainly required, for an hour and a half passed before the looked-for person put in his appearance.

The engraver had long since grown tired of his march, and had thrown himself down upon a lame and rusty-looking lounge. His hair was ruffled worse than his shirt, now; the corner of one of the pockets of the jacket was torn down; there was a rip at the shoulder on the other side; his slippers had been kicked in two directions, and he showed indications of having been in a towering passion.

It could not be said that he was much cooled off even now, but he was tired, and his fury had found some vent and had spent much of its force.

Finally, when it was about eleven o'clock, a door was heard to slam down in the hall below, and footsteps were heard on the stairs.

"Here he comes! Here he comes at last!" the engraver hissed, as he sprung up and caught up a cane from a corner near by; "and see now if I don't go for him. The young upstart! I'll dust his clothes for him, see if I don't."

The door opened, and a young man stepped into the room.

He was about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, or looked to be, and was not by any means bad looking. He had a light mustache, regular features, and keen eyes. There was about him, however, the stamp of dissipation, and there was little of Gotham's fabled "elephant" that he had not seen, as one would imagine.

He was dressed—over-dressed—in a silk hat of the latest style; a double-breasted frock over-coat, elaborately furred, bound, and buttoned; a white muffler just visible under that; a high, neck-supporting collar, with tipped corners, and a gorgeous scarf and pin; a pair of the latest agony in trowsers, and shoes of the finest.

He was certainly a glittering creature, and looked as though he had just stepped down from the shelf, all gilded, enameled, and japanned; for, in spite of the condition of the street, there was scarcely a speck of mud upon him.

It was plain that he had arrived in a cab or carriage.

Magnificent as he was, however, his presence did not overawe the older man to any degree.

"Where in hot place and fires thereof have you been till this hour?" was the salute he got.

"There, now, dad, keep cool, keep cool," the young man admonished; "you will work yourself into a fret, and—"

"Into a fret blames!" cried the engraver, shaking his stick fiercely, "what but a fret have you had me in for the past two hours, I'd like to know! If I had had you here half an hour ago I would have drubbed you finely, you can believe that; and I've a notion to do it now!"

"Keep cool, dad, keep cool!" was the further injunction, and the gloved right hand of the young man waved the older man delicately to desist.

"Keep cool red-hot things! How do you expect a man to keep cool when he is on the fire? Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"Now, dad, you know that you may just as well sit down and take it easy as to keep up such a fuss. You will learn all about it just as soon, and no sooner. You know me well enough for that."

"Well," and Mr. Rogerton buried his cane across the room, "have it your own way, then," and he threw himself back upon the lounge;

"but I've a good notion to break my stick over your back, I have I vow."

"That's all right, dad, I've heard you say that before; but, that day is past, you know. Now if you will keep a little cool, and not shout out what you have to say, we will talk. If you think you can't do that, we had better put it off."

As he said this the young man drew up a chair and sat down near the lounge, having first taken the precaution to dust the chair with his handkerchief.

"All right, all right," mumbled the older man; "but go ahead. I think I've waited long enough for you, without being kept any longer."

The two were father and son.

The young man was Dunlap Rogerton, and, like his father, was an engraver; but he did not follow the occupation. His mother had died when he was young, and his father had reared him right in the studio. As soon as the boy had become old enough to take care of himself, though, he abandoned the place and trade that had become in a measure hateful to him, and had since "gone it alone"—as it is patly put.

In "going it alone" he had finally come to the point of going quite high. He moved in a circle that his father could not approach. And, it had all come about by his making himself one of "the boys" from the start. In politics and at clubs he had come to be quite a local favorite, and could have things pretty much as he liked.

Where his income came from, was not known to many—indeed, to very few was it manifest; but he never lacked for ready money, and always wore clothes of the latest and "heaviest" fashion.

More will be said relative to this young gentleman further on.

"If you look at it in that light," he said, in response to his father's last urging, "you shall not be kept in suspense a moment longer. The work is all done, and done well. No screws left unturned."

"Ha! that is good. That makes me feel better."

"I thought it would."

"And there was no slip made? No false cuts in the block, and no bad spots? Made a perfect proof, did it?"

The matter under their consideration was not engraving, but the old gentleman could apply "shop" to it.

"Not a flaw anywhere, dad. It went off like a charm."

"And that young postman?" in a very low tone.

"As dead as he could be made," with the same caution.

"Good! And the girl?"

"Dead. Both as dead as can be."

"Good again! I tell you, lad, we are on the winning side in *this* game, and no mistake! But, we must be careful, mighty careful."

"You trust me for *that* part of it."

"I can't do anything else, as it stands now. But, I have no fear of you, my lad. The prize is well worth fighting for, and it will be ours."

"Most assuredly, if your scheme is all solid."

"Don't put any doubt there. But, what of the men who did the work?"

"They are safe. Sebastian Hardcroft dare not open his head in regard to *his* part in it, and the other two will be off for Australia before the week is out."

"Are they into the secret?"

"No; nor Sebastian, either, for that matter."

"Good, good!"

"You see I have worked my part of it in disguise, and so has Sebastian; and the other two have no idea of whom they have been dealing with. By the way, what time did my word reach you?"

"A little after six."

"And you set the ball rolling immediately."

"Yes. I passed the word right along to Sebastian, and ever since then I have been in a fever to see you. I did not know but we had got the worst of it, and you had got into the hole with the others."

"No fear of that. But, now we have gone so far, what is to be the next move? We must push it while it is hot."

"First of all, what about the letter?"

"I have it here," and unbuttoning his elegant overcoat, the young man took a letter from a pocket and handed it over. It was the letter that had come across the ocean, addressed to Horatio Boothman.

CHAPTER V.

GRIM DEATH CHEATED.

WHAT of Prince Paul?

We will not attempt to depict his mental anguish when he was brought face to face with his horrible doom.

Only they who have faced death in some terrible form, and have escaped its dreaded jaws by the mere "skin of their teeth," as it were, can form any just conception of what that mental torture is; and even they cannot find language to portray it, it is unutterable; it is a torture that has more stings than one. First, the horror of facing a certain and terrible doom, all hope abandoned, knowing that in a few moments you will have passed from life to death.

Secondly, the heart-pang at being thus cruelly torn from home and family and friends, without warning, and the even keener pang of having all the burden of their sorrow thrust suddenly upon you in anticipation.

Can we wonder that the Prince's brow was bathed in a cold dew of perspiration?

But with him the above-arranged order was reversed. His first and greatest anguish was the prescience he had of his sister's sorrow. The dread and horror of his impending doom were of secondary moment.

If they would only give him a chance to speak! If they would but let him indite a few words of farewell to his sister!

Such unexpressed desires were worse than useless.

When the men were taking him down the last flight of stairs, he made another desperate but ineffectual struggle for liberty. Bound as he was, he could do nothing. The men were powerful human brutes, and his struggles were futile.

It was soon over. The two ruffians exerted all their strength, tripped their victim, and held him for an instant head downward; then they thrust him into the water and pushed him as far under the floating platform as they could reach.

Well may it be asked—What of Prince Paul?

He uttered a groan of keenest anguish as he was thrust under the water, and gave up every hope. Time, to him, was suddenly no more.

So it would have been but for one very fortunate circumstance. That consisted of the simple fact of his hands being tied in front of his body instead of behind.

Had his hands been bound behind him, we had no romance to write.

As soon as the two villains let go their hold, Paul felt himself sinking, feet foremost, to the bottom.

In a moment the bottom was touched, but, with a spring, the young man forced himself to the surface again, his hands, tied together as they were, raised and eager to grasp anything that might afford a hold.

When they came in contact with the bottom of the raft, if such it was, they gripped one of the under beams of the structure.

With a mental "thank God!" the Prince held on, but he was not yet by any means safe. He was still submerged, and it would be impossible for him to hold his breath for more than a few seconds longer at most.

His thoughts were rapid. He must quickly find the opening in the raft, or it would be forever too late.

With a spark of hope now alive in his breast, he gave a hard pull on the beam, let go, and thus propelled himself along in one direction in which the beam lay.

His feet being free, and he a capital swimmer, he could tread water and so keep himself at the top.

He grasped the beam again, gave another pull, and suddenly his head shot up out of the water!

It was none too soon. He had been under water for fully a minute, and in a few seconds more he would certainly have strangled.

As it was he was temporarily saved! Whatever might be in store for him; whether he would get out of that den of horror alive; it was certain that the first and greatest danger had been escaped.

As he paused to rest, hanging with his arms supporting him over the edge of the opening, he heard the men shoveling the earth upon the trap door overhead.

In a little time their work was done, and Paul heard them ascend the other flight of steps and close the door after them.

The next move was an effort to get out upon the platform.

It was no easy performance. With his hands tied, and the cords almost cutting into the flesh, the postman found that it was a task requiring both strength and courage.

At last, however, after one or two failures, he managed to draw himself out, and sat down, panting, upon the float.

What he did then was something entirely proper to the occasion, and something which should be mentioned with reverence. Bowing his head, he offered a prayer of thanksgiving for his deliverance from so great a danger.

That done, he tore the hateful gag from his mouth, and set to work with his strong teeth to tear off the cords that bound his wrists.

This, again, was no easy task, but, it was finally accomplished, and Paul Boothman rose to his feet, free!

"That was a narrow shave," he muttered, with a shudder, as he thought it all over. "My chance for escape was one in a hundred. The villains! I will make them suffer for this night's work."

All around him was dense darkness—darkness that could almost be felt. The air was heavy and foul. The only sound to be heard was a constant dripping of water.

Wet, uncomfortable—shivering with cold, the unfortunate postman was in no pleasant situation; but having escaped the one great danger, his spirits rose rapidly, and his dauntless nature reassured itself.

It might have been worse with him, and with that in mind he brightened up and prepared to make an effort to get out.

Of course he had no means of making a light, so any thought in that direction was but a waste of time. He must trust to the sense of touch.

One thing very favorable was the fact that he was armed. He carried a revolver in his hip pocket, and that his assailants had not taken away from him. It was loaded, and the water had not been able to damage it.

Taking it from his pocket, Paul shook the water out of it, tried the hammer to be sure that it was in working order, and replaced it with the observation:

"I have this with me, anyhow, and I shall not hesitate to use it, either, if I fall in with those fellows again. They were too quick for me before, but they will not have it all their own way if they try it again. I wonder what can have been their object? That is a puzzler. But I will know. I vow that I will hunt them down and make them suffer for this."

This was said in a grim, determined manner that plainly showed the speaker's earnestness in the matter.

Having replaced his revolver, and wrung some of the water out of his clothes, he began feeling around for the stairway.

It was soon found, and he silently made his way to the top.

Taking a firm hold, then, he bent his head and applied his shoulders to the trap-door and tried to lift it. But at first he could not do so. It would not move.

"Am I in a death-trap after all?" he questioned. "Have I escaped death by drowning only to die miserably of starvation? Never! I will get out of here if I have to dig through the solid ground with my naked hands!"

Taking even a better hold than before, if possible, he tried it again, and this time had the satisfaction to feel the door move a little.

"Ha! it is not fastened, except with the few hundred pounds of earth that is heaped upon it, and I guess I can lift it," he communed, half-aloud. "I'll try it again. Now for it."

Once more he put his strength to the test, and this time with better effect than before. The door was lifted an inch or two, and a great quantity of sand came down upon him.

"Good!" he muttered; "it will be so many pounds lighter for the next effort. I shall get out of this part of their den, anyhow."

Taking a few moments' rest, he made ready for another push, and had just begun to lift when a warning creak of the step upon which he was standing caused him to desist.

There was danger in that direction.

"If I break down the stairs I am dished, that is as sure as it is that I am in a bad fix," he thought. "I will try another step."

With this he rose to the next step, which cramped him a little at first, but which, as he soon found, added to his lifting power; for when he exerted his strength next time the door was raised, and a great quantity of earth came tumbling down.

"So far, so good," he exclaimed half aloud; "I am well out of another part of my dilemma."

Going up step by step, throwing the door further back as he advanced, he was soon at the top, when he stepped out upon the floor of the cellar and let the door drop carefully back into its place.

Now to regain the street!

He was still in total darkness, and still had to trust to his hands and feet to perform what his eyes could not, under such circumstances, take any part in.

The first step he took his foot came in contact with the shovel the men had used in covering up the trap-door, and the thought came to him to cover it over again as it had been. The darkness, however, was against his doing this, so he gave it up at once.

He wanted to find the stairs that led to the rooms above. He had no fear of the three men now. His hands free, and he armed and on his guard, they could not take him again by surprise, and in a fair fight he felt confident that he could hold his own against them.

While feeling for the stairs, however, he came to one side of the cellar, and running his hand along the rough, stony wall, came to a door.

"Ha! where can this lead to?" he questioned in thought. "It may be the very means of escape I am after. I will try the other way first, though, before I venture further into this dismal hole."

Going on, the Prince presently found the steps, ascended them and tried the door, and found it locked. His way in that direction was blocked, and he had nothing left to do but to return to the door he had first discovered, and which he had tested and found to be unfastened. And that was what he did.

What lay before him there?

CHAPTER VI.

HERE'S A KEY TO THE PLOT.

"You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree, a very good girl indeed. You have been a great help to me in my work. I am going to make a will one of these days, Selina Peppertree."

"I am glad to know that I please you, Mr. Horatio," the faithful housekeeper returned. "I am sure that I have tried to do so."

"You have pleased me, Selina Peppertree, and you do please me. I am really proud of you. Don't forget that I am going to make my will."

The pair were seated at the table where we left them. They had been working steadily for more than an hour, and had just finished their task.

"I wish you would not mention your will," Miss Peppertree reproved; "it is not with the expectation of reward that I try to make myself useful to you. In truth, I do not want you to give me anything at all in return for the little help I can give you now and then in your work. Pray do not think that I am mercenary."

"So I have heard you say before, Selina Peppertree, so I have heard you say before; but, that does not alter the fact that I am going to make my will one of these days, just the same. Now, if you will please return Abraham twenty-nine and Moses seventy-eight to their pigeon-holes, I will not ask you to do another thing tonight. We will have a little chat and review our labors. You see I call it your labor as well as mine, because you have done a good share of it with me."

"I wish you would not call it so, Mr. Horatio," the housekeeper protested, as she rose to obey his request; "I wish you would not, indeed. I am your paid servant, and as my house-work is very light, I am only too glad to help you at your desk whenever I can, and thus try to give you the value of my wages."

"Tush and nonsense! So I have heard you say before, Selina Peppertree, so I have heard you say before. You hold your opinion about it, and I will hold mine."

"Oh! why can he not understand me?" Miss Peppertree silently sighed, as she gathered up the manuscript and prepared to put it away. "My heart grows weary with waiting. Why can he not see that it is a labor of love? I am sure I try to make it plain to him. Why can he not read it in my voice and manner, or even in my eyes?"

Abraham twenty-nine and Moses seventy-eight having been returned to their proper places, the housekeeper went back to her chair and sat down, arranging her little shawl over her breast as she did so, and looking as stiff and prim as ever.

"Selina Peppertree, this genealogical business is exasperating work," Mr. Boothman observed after a moment's silence.

"It is slow work, certainly," Miss Peppertree modified.

"I say it is exasperating work, Selina Peppertree; exasperating work!" Mr. Boothman exclaimed. "It is nothing else. When, where, and how am I ever going to get track of that second son of Moses seventy-eight, and his descendants. That is one thing that is worrying me, and it has worried me for a long time."

"And if that were the only one of the kind, Mr. Horatio," the housekeeper intimated.

"Ha! I only wish it were. But, it may all come out right yet. You know some of the doubtful ones came out all right after a long time. It takes time, Selina Peppertree, it takes time to do anything."

Miss Peppertree sighed, as though to say she knew that only too well; it was taking a long time for her to force her way into the citadel of his heart.

"Yes, that is true," she admitted; "take for instance the case of your brother. See how long you were in trying to learn whom he married."

"True, true. I was a long time trying to get at that. The Chicago fire did not blot it quite all out, though it did come very near doing it."

"I have often wondered what a miracle it was that the two children were saved at such an awful time as that," Miss Peppertree reflected.

"It was, it was indeed," Mr. Boothman admitted. "And," he added, "speaking about finding out persons and things, see how that committee found me out and saddled the children upon me."

"Yes, that's so. But, then, it was your duty to take them, Mr. Horatio, and you can now say with pride that you did your whole duty by them. Moreover, it was they that started you upon your genealogical research—or I should say it was their coming that did it."

"You are right, Selina Peppertree, you are exactly right," Mr. Boothman agreed immediately. "Let us go back and look over the whole ground."

"With pleasure."

"We will begin with it just where it began with us, and that was at the time of the great fire in Chicago. I knew that my brother was living there, with his family, and naturally—when the names of the lost began to be published—I watched the papers to see if any mention was made of him. I did not find it; and the first I knew of the sad fate that had overtaken him, was when the children were brought to me and I was told to give them a home. By the way, as we are not working now, Selina Peppertree, turn the gas down one half."

"Oh, yes, of course; I forgot that, Mr. Horatio."

"There, that is right. Yes, that was the first I knew of it. Well, I took the children in, and, as you have said, did my duty by them. And, they might be here yet, but for their self-will and desire to be free from restraint."

"That is quite true. It is no fault of yours, Mr. Horatio; and, if I may be allowed to say so, I am sure it was no fault of mine."

"Quite right, Selina Peppertree, quite right; we have nothing to blame ourselves for. But this is not getting on with what we set out to talk about. Not only did that fire take my brother and his wife, but it took everything they had in the world but their children. Not a thing remained."

"I remember it quite well."

"Of course you do. And that was the starting of my genealogical work—the very starting of it, as we may say. I wanted to learn whom my brother had married, in order that the children's mother's family might bear a share of the expense of rearing them; and to do that I wrote to every one of my own family that I thought might be likely to know anything about it. In their replies I got every other sort of information but that which I was after, and finally, when I began to hear of new branches of the family, I became interested, and commenced to make a little record. From that small beginning grew what you see around us to-night."

"You state it correctly, Mr. Horatio."

"But, to return to the point. Put me on the track, Selina Peppertree, if you see that I get off. I had heard the name of my brother's wife, and so had others of our relatives, but neither I nor they could remember it. The children did not know it. The family record was destroyed at the time of the fire, of course. You see what a dark outlook it was."

"Yes, indeed."

"But, in spite of all that, and after years of work all around it, I got hold of the name at last, only a few months ago, and now am in a fair way to learn all about the woman and her ancestors, I suppose."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"It appears that the maiden name of the mother of Paul and Elna was Rogerton. I remembered the name well enough as soon as I heard it, and so did the others who had heard it before. There was no doubt on that point. My brother married her in England, where he met her. Well, as soon as I got hold of that much, I had enough to work upon. I began to look into the Rogerton family—or to be more exact, I have begun to make the start to do so."

"Yes, that is nearer right."

"I looked for the name in this city first of all, for a name is to be found in New York if it is to be found anywhere, I have begun to think; and luckily I found it right away. And, by rare good fortune, my first crack brought to light a brother to my brother's wife; that is to say, an uncle to Paul and Elna."

"You told me at the time, Mr. Horatio."

"I believe I did. To be exact, however, this man was a half-brother only. It seems his father had married twice, and my brother's wife was the issue of the second union. So, you see, it—By the way, Selina Peppertree, just cover your inkstand, will you, please? Some of the ink would certainly evaporate before morning, and that would be a useless waste, you know."

"Oh, yes, of course; I forgot that, Mr. Horatio."

"There, that is right. As I was about to say, you see how this case has come around at last, and so we will not consider the case of that second son of Moses seventy-eight as entirely hopeless."

"Of course not, Mr. Horatio; for while there is life there is hope, you know it is said."

This was followed by a heavy sigh, as the burden of her own weary waiting rushed upon her.

"Just so, Selina Peppertree, just so; and that is why I insist that this genealogical work is a fascinating business, a mighty fascinating business."

"Hold on, Mr. Horatio, you are off the track now, surely," Miss Peppertree interrupted.

"Off the track? How do you make that out?"

"Why, you began with saying that the work was exasperating—mighty exasperating, as you expressed it; and you now declare it to be in the same degree fascinating. Which do you mean?"

The housekeeper sprung her little trap playfully.

"Did I say that?" Mr. Boothman demanded; "did I? Well, it is both. Yes, it is both, Selina Peppertree, both. But, I was getting off the track, sure enough, for I have not quite finished what I was talking about. I went to see that half-brother, and when I had told him my story, and who I am, and all about it, he became as interested in the matter as we are. He informed me that his father is dead, and gave me the address of some legal gentlemen in London, who he thought could furnish all the information that I might want. And so you see how nicely we are swimming along. Selina

Peppertree, how very nicely we are progressing! Oh! I tell you this genealogical business is exhilarating work, too, and no mistake."

He had talked himself out of one state of spirits into another; had risen from a state of "blues" to quite a degree of buoyancy.

"And a reply from those London gentlemen is what you are so anxiously looking for now," Miss Peppertree tacked on, to fill the story out full and round.

"Exactly," Mr. Boothman exclaimed, "exactly; and that brings me back to that postman's queer prank. If it is the work of that boy Paul, just to fret me, I will make it hot for him, and he can depend on it. He used to play tricks on me when he was younger, and he may be up to it again. I'll punish him; see if I don't!"

"And serve him right, too; but I don't think he would do that now."

"Well, we'll see. But, look what time it is getting to be! I must to bed! I won't want to get up in the morning. Good-night, Selina Peppertree. Stop the clock, as usual, so it will not wear needlessly. Set it again by the six-o'clock whistle. I won't keep you up another minute. You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree, and you will please keep the fact in mind that I have not made my will yet. Good-night."

CHAPTER VII.

IN CRUEL BONDAGE.

LET US take up a dropped thread.

When the man sprung upon Elna Boothman, as described at the close of a previous chapter, we need not say that the girl was frightened. She tried to scream, but the man was too quick for her, and before she could do so his hand was clapped over her mouth.

"Keep still," he hissed, "or it will be the worse for you."

At the same time he gave her no opportunity to be otherwise than silent.

The carriage was at the curb, in a moment, the rascal's confederate sprung out, and, in a brief time, the girl was in the vehicle and being driven rapidly away.

It had all taken place so quickly that Elna was partly dazed.

What meant the outrage? What of her brother? Had harm come to him? Where was she being taken? What fate awaited her?

A hundred questions such as these flashed into her mind at once. She could, of course, answer none of them.

She could not see her captors very distinctly. One had the appearance of being a large, rough man, and the other she had already had a better opportunity to look at. He was of medium size, ordinarily well dressed, and altogether an average-looking person. But, nothing of these particulars could be discerned now, as stated.

As soon as she had had time to collect her thoughts, he began to struggle to get away from them.

Such an attempt was altogether useless.

She had felt the hold of the man who had first seized her relax a little, and thought she might possibly break away.

Her effort was well made, but it amounted to nothing. The man's hold tightened again immediately.

"No, you don't, my pretty kitten," he said; "no you don't. I know you want to scratch, but I'm not going to let you do it. And I'm not going to let you mew, neither, so don't try it. I suppose it isn't pleasant to have my hand so tight over your pretty mouth, but I have to keep it there. I guess I can do better, though. Burke," to his fellow rascal, "there is a silk handkerchief in the outside pocket of my coat; just draw it out and we will gag the little dear."

The other fellow did as directed, and in a few moments a knot had been tied in the handkerchief, then forced into the girl's mouth, and the ends tightly tied behind her neck.

There was no possibility of her making any very loud noise, and her captors had less trouble.

"Not that I'd object to holding my hand over your pretty mouth," the leader of the two remarked, "but I know you don't like it, and I don't want to be too rough with you. I guess we'll tie your hands, too."

It did not take long to accomplish this, and after that the young lady was relieved of their disagreeable embrace.

"What be ye goin' ter do with her?" inquired the one called Burke.

"Why do you ask that?" the other demanded.

"You know what I told you the instructions were, don't you?"

"Yes; but I thought mebby you'd changed yer mind."

"And what put that into your head?"

"Well, she's a heap too purty ter be killed, that's all. I thought mebby you would want ter keep her. It's all th' same, as long as she is out of th' way, ain't it?"

Elna's heart beat hard and fast. It was their intention to kill her! Had her brother already met that fate? She was almost crazed with anxiety and fear.

"I see you are a good guesser, Burke," the

master villain responded to the other's suggestion, "and I see you have an eye for female beauty. It won't work in this case, though. The job has got to be done. That is what we took hold of it for."

"An' how?"

"Say, now, you will have the tender thing's nerves all upset, if you go on like that, Burke. Let me be frank with you and her. Your part of the business ends when we have turned her over to a certain woman that I know of. Then she is dead to you, and you have earned your money. I will take care of the rest of it."

Burke laughed coarsely.

"I see inter it as clear as kin be," he declared. "It is none o' my business concerns as I kin see, though," he added, "so I don't keer anything about it. Let it be as you say."

In the mean time the carriage was rattling steadily on, and was covering ground at a rapid pace.

Elna tried to keep track of the direction in which she was being taken, but found that she could not do so. There were too many quick turns this way and that for her to keep half of them in mind.

It was all the more terrible that she was not allowed to talk. If she could have questioned her captors; if she could have pleaded with them; but, that was not to be thought of. They were afraid that she would scream and thus attract attention, and were not going to take any chances.

It was a wise precaution on their part, as she had to admit to herself, for if she had had the opportunity she most certainly would have let her voice be heard.

It was a wonder that she did not faint, as most girls in a similar situation would have done, but she did not. Perhaps there was something of her brother's dauntless spirit in her, too.

She crouched as far back into her corner of the carriage as possible, and shrank from the touch of the rascal all she could.

But she could not close her ears to their talk, and had to listen to all that was said.

"What is there in this game, anyhow?" Burke presently inquired.

"Now you are going too far," the other rebuked. "You know all that it is necessary you should know about it, and let that suffice. I do not mind telling you, however, that you know just as much about it as I do. We are paid for doing a certain work, and that is the end of it."

"I know; but it would be some satisfaction ter know who a feller is workin' fer."

"Yes, but you won't find out. No use pumping. You are working for me, and that is all there is for you to know about it."

There was no chance for Elna to learn anything from such talk as this. Whatever the leader knew, he was not going to tell the other, and it was clear that the latter knew nothing whatever.

Had the same men already disposed of her brother? It was a question she desired above all others to put to them.

After a ride of considerable length, her journey came suddenly to an end. The carriage wheeled in to the curb, and came to a quick stop.

"Here we are," said the principal of the two rascals, "and now if the coast is all clear our work will soon be done. Look out, Burke, and see how the land lies."

The other villain did as directed.

"Don't see a soul in sight," he reported.

"Now is our chance, I should say."

His report was correct. It was a lonely street, in a none-too-savory neighborhood, and no one was to be seen.

Just a moment later, however, a cab came into sight, and rattled leisurely along through that thoroughfare, approaching from the same direction in which the carriage had come.

Hearing the cab, the two men paused in their work to wait until it passed.

It came up to where the carriage stood, rattled steadily on, turned the next corner, and disappeared, and that was the last they saw of it.

Had they known it, though, the cab stopped soon after passing the corner; a young man got out, and he, running quickly and carefully back to the corner, drew a pair of opera glasses from his pocket, leveled them at the carriage, and watched.

This young man, whose acquaintance we have made, was Dunlap Rogerton.

As soon as the cab had disappeared, and after taking one more careful survey of the street, the master-spirit of the villainous pair got out of the carriage and ran up the steps of the house before which it had stopped.

He gave a sharp pull at the bell, and a hard-featured woman came to the door.

Her sharp eyes recognized her caller immediately.

"Why, Mr. Hardcroft, is it you?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," the man acknowledged; "but don't speak out so plump, if you please. I don't care to have my name shouted over the city."

"Oh! Ha! I see you are on business. And what is it this time? Have you another bird for

my cage! Ha, ha, ha!" and a disagreeable chuckle ended what she had to say.

"I am here on business, as you have rightly guessed," the man owned, "but it is a little out of the regular order with us."

"And what is it?" the woman asked in a half-whisper.

"I have a young woman here as a prisoner. I want you to take her, give her a good room and take good care of her. There is money in it—more money than you have seen in a year, perhaps. You are to take the best of care that she does not escape, and you must be sure that she has no chance to communicate with any one outside of the house—or inside, either, for that matter."

"Oh, come, now, Mr. Hardcroft," the woman said in a tone of complaint, "did you ever know me to let one get away that I ever got my hands on? I guess not. She will be safe with me, you may depend on that. Bring her in!"

"That is all right, aunty, but you want to take extra precaution in this case. I will bring her right in, as soon as that party on the other side of the street has gone on."

The person in question was soon beyond sight, and Hardcroft and his man lost no time then in taking Elna out of the carriage and hurrying her into the house.

"Carry her right up-stairs," the hard-featured woman directed, "and there will be no more trouble with her. I will take care of her after that."

The men obeyed her directions, and Elna was as helpless as a child in their hands.

She was carried into a room on the third floor, and placed upon a chair, but she was no sooner released than she sprung to her feet and made a dart for the door.

"No you don't!" exclaimed Hardcroft, and he sprung after her and jerked her rudely back. "We'll have none of that, if you please."

"I will cure her of that," declared the woman; "just wait a moment."

She left the apartment and hurried down-stairs, soon returning with a chain in her hands. It was a small but strong chain, about ten feet in length, and at one end was a lock bracelet.

Stooping down, the woman quickly snapped the bracelet around Elna's ankle, and that done, secured the other end to an iron ring that was in the base-board near the bed.

The poor girl was helpless in the power of her enemies, and sinking down upon a chair, began to weep bitterly. The two men laughed at her misery; complimented the woman upon her excellent plan; and, after some little talk, left the house and drove away.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRYING A CRAFTY GAME.

"Ha! a cute trick, Sebastian Hardcroft, a very cute trick; but it won't go on reckon this count."

The words were uttered by Dunlap Rogerton.

From his place at the corner of the street, with the aid of his opera glass, he could discern all that took place at the carriage. He saw the young lady lifted out and carried into the house, and that was all he waited to see.

Putting away the glass, he returned to his cab, picking his way with fastidious care in order to avoid the mud as far as possible, and it was as he turned away that he uttered the words quoted.

Reaching the cab, he entered, first giving directions to the driver, and off the conveyance rattled.

"Yes, a very cute trick indeed," he commented, "but it won't work. I will have a hand in that myself, I think. The rascal! he will come to me now, and tell me that the girl has been put out of the way, and all that sort of thing, just as he was paid to do; and all the time she will be alive and in his hands. I know him of old."

The young man laughed to himself as he thought it all over.

"I am just as well satisfied, though, as it is," he further muttered. "She is truly a charmer, as I saw her when she came out of the house, and I think I could love her without any trouble. That is just what has struck Hardcroft, the old sinner! She has impressed him at first sight, and he has quickly resolved to spare her and have her all to himself to woo and win by force. Ha, ha, ha! I don't blame him; but it will not be my fault if his little bubble doesn't burst and he get left in the lurch."

The cab rattled on, and when it stopped it was at the entrance to one of the many well-known clubs of which Gotham can boast.

The young man alighted, tossed the driver his fare, and went into the place, having a boy to clean his shoes and brush his clothes before he entered the main room.

Not many were present, owing chiefly to the weather and the bad condition of the streets. Those who were there, however, gave young Rogerton a hearty welcome, and he was soon in demand at one of the pool tables.

The young man took hold, after much pressing, but he was not in the right mood for playing, and made many very bad shots.

"What is the matter with you to-night?" demanded one of the players at the same table.

"I am not in trim, as I told you," was the answer. "I have an engagement on hand, and cannot put my thoughts on the game. I told you how it would be."

"Oh, well, drive ahead and do the best you can, then. It isn't often that you are out of line at pool."

The games went on, but it was not long when the young man dropped out.

"There is a man I must see," he observed, as Sebastian Hardcroft entered the room, "and you will have to let some one else take my place."

Putting up his cue, he resumed his hat, cuffs, and coats, and went over to where Hardcroft had taken a seat.

"Well, what is the word?" he demanded, when he came near the man.

"The word is a good word," was the answer.

"And what is that good word?"

"The good word is that they are both out of the way, and there will be a nine days' wonder as to where they have gone to."

"You mean they are both dead?"

"That is about the size of it."

"And everything went off safely?"

"It couldn't have worked better."

The young man was tempted to tell the other what he knew, and to give him his opinion of it in strong terms, but he held back. He reasoned that it would be more satisfaction to cheat him. Besides, if he pushed the matter any the fellow might go yet and finish the work he had left undone.

The two sat down and entered into an earnest conversation.

"I suppose you can give me sufficient proof that they are dead?" the young man interrogated.

"The other day you said nothing about proof," was the answer, "and so I have taken no pains about that part of it. It will be easy enough for me to bring my men to you, though, if you like, and you can hear what they have to say about it."

"It would be too much trouble to adopt the necessary disguise; for I would not meet them openly."

By the way, the man Hardcroft was now slightly disguised, but it was one that was familiar to those who knew him well.

"Then you will take my word for it?" he questioned.

"Yes, I'll take your word," was the answer.

Hardcroft looked pleased, but tried not to let it be seen.

"It is all right," he assured, "and you can depend on it. What object would I have in fooling you? I would like to know more about the case, though, Rogerton;" and he leaned forward in a very confidential way, as though expecting that his desire would be gratified.

"I do not know what object you could have in trying to fool me," Dunlap answered. "In the first place, it would not be well for you to do so," with a look that was full of meaning, and which caused the older rascal to wince a little; "and in the next place, you have been well paid to do a simple piece of work, and there is no reason why you should not have done it well. You will have no objections to telling me how it was done, however, will you? We will talk about your suggestion further on."

Baited with the hope that he would learn more, Hardcroft was in no hurry to part company with his young companion.

"It is your right to know how it was done," he willingly acknowledged, "and I will give you the full account of the whole night's work. By the way, here is the letter that I was to get hold of."

Here he drew a letter from his pocket and handed it over.

"That is the thing we want," exclaimed young Rogerton, as he took it eagerly enough, looking at it and then storing it away in his pocket: "but," he added, "what did you do with the rest of the letters, papers, and so forth; and the bag?"

"Why, I guess they are in the hall of the vacant house yet."

"Great Scott!" and the exclamation was uttered with vim, "you must get them away from there! If they are found there it will put the long-noses onto that house like a ton of lead. You ought to have thought of that."

"Oh, I hadn't forgotten it; I am going back there to dispose of them."

"How?"

"Why, I must put them where they will be found, and where they will turn away suspicion from our quarter."

"Do so, by all means; and be sure that they are not seen in your possession. Now, go on with your story."

Hardcroft went ahead, then, and told a straight story so far as the fate of Prince Paul was concerned. But beyond that he drifted from the truth sadly.

"You see it all worked as it was planned, so far," he observed, "and the rest of it went off just as nicely. I will give you the history of that, too."

"I went to the girl, just as it was planned, and gave her the story. She was already in a great way about her brother, as I could see. She jumped at the bait like a hungry pike, and was ready in no time; but when she got down to the street she took a sudden notion that she would not get into the carriage. That blocked me for a moment, but I got around the difficulty. I dismissed Hugh—but of course he knew that it wasn't meant, and besides, I motioned him to follow on: and I set out to accompany her to the El. station."

"By the way," the young man interrupted, "how was she for looks? was she good-looking?" This was another hard shot at the fellow.

"Oh, she would pass muster in a crowd," he answered, carelessly; "I did not pay much attention to her looks."

"Well, go on."

"Well, when we reached a dark spot, and there was no one near, I just made a grab at her, got one arm around her, and one hand over her mouth; and up came Hugh with the carriage and we bundled her into it and were off at the double quick."

So far, too, the story was all right, but from that point it went far wide of the truth.

"As soon as we started off," Hardcroft continued, "I chloroformed the young lady, and that settled all kicking on her part. We went up-town quite a distance, all the time bearing off to the North River, and when we stopped we were at one of the most lonesome spots on the whole front. There we made sure that no one was near, and having done so, took the senseless girl out of the carriage and dumped her gently over into the water. Ha, ha, ha! it will be the same old story in the papers when her body comes to light."

If Dunlap Rogerton had not known positively that the man was lying to him, this story would have been accepted as true; but as he knew otherwise, he could hardly resist the temptation to tell him so. For reasons already stated, however, he held back and let the man have it his own way.

"You have done it well," he complimented, "and now when you have disposed of that mail-matter in some safe way, you will have nothing to fear. What about the man who helped you?"

"They are going to Australia, as agreed. I am to pay them a hundred dollars each, and their passage. In a few days they will be off, and nothing need be feared from them. When men of their stamp get as far away from home as that, they will never turn up again."

"You must see to it that they do go, and not let them fool you."

"I will take care of that."

"You have been well paid for this work, Hardcroft, as I said before, and you do not want to let anything slip up. If you get into any trouble, do not look to me. I have a rope around your neck, you know, and if you mention my name I will tighten up on it. You are between two fires, you see. Besides, you cannot bring me into this if you want to. You can't prove that I ever said a word to you about it. See Take warning, and be careful accordingly."

"That is all right, Dunlap; and now about the rest of it—can't you let me into the whole scheme? I have done well by you so far, and you ought to trust me. I know it must be something big."

The young man laughed.

"Don't take me for a fool," he said, "pray don't. You have been paid for your part in the matter, and there you stop. That is all there is in it for you, unless I happen to want to use you again, in which case I will let you know. Now I must be off, or the old gentleman will think everything has miscarried."

So, after a little further talk, they parted, and, having in the mean time sent for another cab, young Rogerton entered it and drove away.

It was a singular parting. Each had a hold upon the other in peculiar ways, and each was laughing in his sleeve over his own advantage in the game. If there was any advantage between them, it appeared to rest with the younger man.

Where Dunlap Rogerton went from there, has been shown.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER MAN IN PERIL.

ACCEPTING everything else as it stood, what Paul Boothman wished for most in his unpleasant situation was a light.

"If I had only a light," he thought, "it would not be so bad; but as it is I am in a doubly unpleasant fix. I do not know where I am, except in a general way, and have no means of guiding myself. That is, no way except by feeling along. It isn't by any means pleasant. No knowing what sort of a hole I will run into before I get out of here."

These reflections ran through his mind as he carefully descended the cellar stair again to return to the door he had first found.

He did not care to make any noise if it could be avoided, for if he could get away without meeting his enemies, so much the better. Not that he feared them now, but to avoid them was better than fighting them.

Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.

He now had his revolver, with its water-proof cartridges, in his right hand, ready for instant use; and he fully intended to use it, too, if an enemy blocked his path.

They had shown their hands, now; had made it only too clear that they wanted his life; and he need not hesitate to use the most desperate means in his power to get away from them.

Arriving at the foot of the stair, the Prince proceeded carefully along the wall, and soon came again to the door he had found before.

Opening it silently, he felt the way cautiously with his foot and passed out into the unexplored blackness beyond.

Not a ray of light was to be seen in any direction.

Two short steps led down from the door on the outside, and beyond them the ground was hard and smooth.

Paul had closed the door after him, and now with his hand on the wall to guide himself, pushed cautiously on.

He seemed to be in a narrow tunnel. On one side were the rough stones of the cellar wall, and on the other the hard, damp earth. The space between was not more than two feet.

It was a tunnel, as he soon fully decided; and as he had passed out of a cellar in order to get into it, it followed that the tunnel must run along just behind the walls of the cellars on that street.

Where it led to, he could not of course surmise.

But he could tell something of its direction. Knowing the location of the house in which he had met his fate, which side of the street it was on, and having now the walls of the cellars at his right hand, he knew that he must be moving north.

It was slow progress, for he had to feel the way with his feet, so as not to tumble into any trap that might lie in wait for him, and at the same time had to keep one hand on the side wall, and the other stretched out ahead.

He had gone quite a little distance, when suddenly his right hand, with the revolver in it, came with a sharp click against a wall that cut off further progress.

"Have I reached the end of the hole?" Paul thought. "If I have, I am no nearer out than I was when I started. Let's see—or rather, feel."

It was not as he had feared. It was only the wall of a cellar that extended further back than its neighbors, and here the tunnel turned sharply in its course to follow its direction.

Having learned this, Paul pushed on, still guided as before.

The tunnel followed the wall of that cellar around to its second corner, and there it left it and bent away to the left.

It was now supported by timbers on both sides, at a distance of eight or ten feet apart, the tops of which as the Prince concluded, must be capped and laid with planks. His guess was correct, as he would have found could he have seen.

His mind was filled with vain speculations as to where the tunnel led to, and what it could be used for. That it ended in such a dismal death-trap as he had just escaped from, was terribly significant.

Its course was now straight again, and as it had made a half bend, he knew that he was going toward the west, or toward the street next to the one on which he had met with his almost-fatal adventure.

On he went, feeling his way with the utmost care and caution, and after what seemed a long distance, he came abruptly against another wall.

He had crossed the span between the two streets, and this was the cellar wall of the houses in the rear of the one in which he had been trapped.

No sooner had he come to that wall than he heard voices, and immediately after a light flashed into the darkness from above.

Prince Paul gripped his revolver firmly, and took in his situation as speedily as possible.

At his right was a flight of steps leading up to a door that had just been opened. Here the tunnel was larger than elsewhere. It was formed irregularly round, and there was quite a little space behind the stair.

It was but a moment's work for the Prince to dodge behind the stair, and thus to place himself out of the way, if not out of sight.

He was none too soon. Heavy steps were heard at the top, and two men began to descend, the foremost carrying a lamp.

Paul maintained perfect silence, curious to know what the men wanted, who they were, and all about them; but he was more eager to effect his escape and to get home to relieve his sister of the anxiety he knew she must have concerning him.

"Poor Elma!" he would reflect, as his thoughts would turn to her, "she must be terribly alarmed about me by this time. I must make it my first duty to go and let her know that I am safe, and then report my adventures and loss after that."

But he was destined to see further adventures before he got out of the trap.

When the men reached the bottom of the steps,

they stopped, and the one with the lamp called back to some one at the top, saying.

"Here we are, boys; and now bundle the infernal spy down to us and we will take care of him for you."

The Prince's nerves tingled, his muscles tightened up like muscles of steel, and every sense was on the alert. Here was danger to a fellow-creature, he instantly knew, and it rested with him to save the man's life.

Who the person was, he did not stop to give a thought; he knew that it was some poor fellow in the hands of enemies, as he had been only so short a time previously, and it was his duty to save him.

"All right; down he comes!" was the response from above; "and you want to take the best of care of him."

"Ha, ha! We'll do that, never fear: let him come."

There was a slight scuffle at the top of the steps, and then a heavy body came bounding down with a force that made the stair creak.

It was the body of a man, and the postman, from his place of hiding, saw that he was securely bound, hands and feet, and that a gag was in his mouth. Whoever he was, he had fallen into bad hands, and his fate was certain—or it would have been under different circumstances.

In the case of this man there did not appear to be one favorable circumstance. He was too securely bound to have the least chance to escape. His wrists and ankles were strongly tied; he was in a doubled-up position; a short, strong stick had been thrust over his elbows and under his knees, and he rolled down to the bottom of the steps like a ball.

It was no gentle usage that he was receiving.

The two men at the bottom laughed brutally, and the one at the top was not slow to join them.

"There he is," the latter called out, "an' now do what you please with him; only make sure work of him."

"Oh, we'll do that, never fear," was the response. "Shut your door, now, and leave the rest of it to us."

"All right. I won't fasten it, though, and you can come out without calling me when you come back."

"All right."

With another laugh the man at the top of the steps retired, shutting the door, and the two others were alone with their victim.

Not quite alone with him, however.

Prince Paul had been taking a good look at the two rascals, as he had the opportunity, even though it was but a brief one.

They were not villainous-looking fellows, such as the ones who had attacked him, but had more the appearance of ordinary business men. They were in ordinary, every day attire, were not bad-looking; and seen on the street, were such men as one would never suspect capable of such work as this.

Paul did not know them, had never seen them before that he could remember, but he made mental notes of their faces so that he could recognize them again at any time or place.

"Well, what about carrying him?" the one with the lamp interrogated, when they had had their laugh, and their confederate at the top of the stairs had gone away.

"We might do it," was the response, "if the way wasn't so narrow, but we would find him a good load."

"So I think; and, as the passage is so mighty narrow, I think we had better make the fellow walk. Doomed men have to walk to the gallows, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, that's so. Well, walk it is, then."

Taking a knife from his pocket, the second speaker stooped and cut the cords that bound their victim's feet, and pulled out the stick from under his knees.

"There," he said, giving the man a wicked prod with the knife, "get upon your pins, you hound, you! and no fooling about it, either."

The sharp sting of the knife caused the man to flinch a little, as the Prince could see, but not a sound escaped him, and he sullenly obeyed the order and managed to get upon his feet.

Paul could now get a better look at him. He was a young man, not more than thirty years of age, and was good-looking. He was a little under the medium height, but was heavy, and looked to be strong and active. He was well developed, and his face was strongly lined and determined in expression, while his eyes flashed like points of polished steel in the light of the lamp. There was something in them to incite fear.

No sooner was he upon his feet than the man who had freed those members proceeded to bind his arms the more securely, passing a cord over them and tying it behind his back. At the same time the one who was holding the lamp presented a revolver at the prisoner's head.

It was clear that they considered him a dangerous man.

When that was done, they prepared to move forward. The man with the lamp going ahead, the prisoner was ordered to follow him, and the third coming behind him with a weapon in hand. And so they started, the prisoner having

been warned that at the first sign on his part of an attempt to escape, a bullet would find its way into him.

As soon as they had proceeded a little distance from the stair, the Prince emerged from his hiding-place and crept along after them silently.

It began to look as though there would be a little excitement in that narrow tunnel in the near future.

CHAPTER X.

A NOCTURNAL MARAUDER.

HORATIO BOOTHMAN would have called "Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!" had it not been that the hour was so unseemly, and that she had not long since retired to bed and was, as he naturally supposed, fast in the embrace of slumber.

He could not sleep, and he wanted a bottle of spirits which he knew was somewhere down in Selina's domain.

If he had a little of that, he thought, it would quiet his nerves so that he could drop off and sleep soundly.

He had been in bed for more than two hours, and yet sleep would not come to him. His thoughts were too busy. The genealogical skeleton was rattling its ghastly bones up and down in his brain, and he could not dismiss it.

This was one of the occasions on which he wished he had never thought of such a thing as his family record.

It was a business that had its ups and downs, and this was one of the "downs." Dates and names were swimming around in his mind in a confused way, with here and there a blank space into which they were trying vainly to fit themselves. Then here and there out of the misty somewhere would stalk the forms of missing links—so to say, and they would give the assemblage of dates a stirring up that would set them all to dancing in the most wildly confused manner that may be imagined.

It had been in vain that the unhappy genealogist had turned from side to side, and had tried to force his thoughts into another channel. Nothing would relieve him. The genealogical ogre was after him, and sleep was out of the question for the time being.

Could Mr. Boothman have known it, his faithful housekeeper was in the same sleepless condition.

Not that she had the genealogical nightmare, like he had, but she had other things upon her mind, which, to her, were almost as distressing.

Selina Peppertree loved, but loved in vain. The object of her affections was deaf, dumb and blind, so far as any recognition of her longing, burning, yearning, undying love for him was concerned, and he was distant and reserved—oh so reserved."

There was a field of ice between them that she felt she would never be able to break through.

In every way possible she had tried to make herself indispensable to his happiness, in order to make him see that what he needed above everything else in the world was a wife, and that the person most needed to fill that place acceptably was herself.

Now she began to get her eyes open to see that she had been standing in her own light in the matter. Had she not been so faithful in the performance of her every duty that there was no need of a wife to fill her place? She began to look upon it in that light now.

It was true that Mr. Horatio appreciated her efforts, for he very frequently told her so; but that did not bring her any nearer the desired goal than when she had first entered his employ.

With such reflections as these running through her mind, it was as much out of the question for her to sleep as it was for her worthy employer.

But, to return to Mr. Boothman.

The more he thought about that bottle of spirits somewhere down in the kitchen, or dining-room—he was not certain where—the more he thought that he must have it.

Finally he got up from his sleepless bed, donned his unmentionables and gown, opened his door with all the silence possible, and groped his way down to the regions below.

The housekeeper's room was on the next floor above, and he did not want to disturb her.

He reached the door of the kitchen without any misstep, knowing the ground as well as he did, and silently he opened that and went in, closing it after him.

Now he could strike a light without the least fear of its waking his faithful servant.

Going to the match-safe he took out a match, lighted it, turned on the gas a little and applied the match to that. That done, he blew out the match, and returned it to the safe in order that it might be used again in some necessity where a new match would not be required.

With all his faults, if he had any, he had the one virtue of being very saving in everything.

When that was done he turned his attention to his search for the bottle. He knew about where to look for it, in two or three places, and so expected no difficulty in finding it.

He was not disappointed. The bottle was soon in his eager hands, and it was about as full

as when he had had occasion to use it before, now some weeks past.

It was kept on hand only as a friend in need, and was considered almost as a medicine. The only other use to which it was ever put was when, very rarely, Selina required it in cooking some sort of dish that needed its flavor.

This by the way, to disabuse the mind of any unworthy suspicions.

Having secured the bottle, Mr. Boothman next turned his attention to a glass, and when he had provided that, his whole attention was given to the liquor.

Pouring out a little, taking care not to overdo it, he returned the bottle to its place and sat down to enjoy his treat, and at the same time to get his nerves in condition for sleep.

He sipped the brandy slowly, taking but a very little at each sip, and while he sipped he did his best to drive away the genealogical goblin.

He looked around at the tidy kitchen, and his thoughts turned upon Selina Peppertree. What a treasure she was! How clean and orderly everything appeared! Every article in the room had its place, and nothing was out of its proper station. Where in all the world could he have found such another treasure as Selina Peppertree? Nowhere. It was out of the question. Selina was a good girl, a mighty good girl, and he would not forget her in his will. Upon that point he was firmly settled.

One thought brought another, and the genealogical mormo gradually began to lose its grip.

He reflected upon his bachelor state, asking himself, as he had many a time before, why he had never married. His speculations upon that question brought him to the same result he had always reached in considering it. What did he want of a wife? He had a perfect housekeeper, one who was his companion in his work and pleasure as well, and one whom he could trust. As long as she remained with him, he was well enough off as he was. In her he had many of the advantages of a good wife, and none of the disadvantages of a poor one. Yes, the reason why he had never married was because Selina Peppertree was his housekeeper.

He spent half an hour or so over that little quantity of brandy, allowing his thoughts to wander along in pleasant paths, and at the end of that time the genealogical demon had been routed and he began to grow drowsy.

Pushing away the empty glass, he rose up and turned out the light, and softly opened the door leading into the hall. Going out, he closed it after him as softly, and felt his way along to the stairs, congratulating himself that he had not been the cause of any alarm to the housekeeper.

Selina had a horror of robbers, and he knew that if he allowed her to hear him she would sleep no more that night.

As there was no light burning anywhere, the house was in total darkness, but that made no difference to Mr. Boothman. He could find his way without a light almost as well as with one, and experienced no inconvenience on that account.

His room was in the rear of his "shop," as he sometimes called his working-room, and the door was at the rear of the hall. He had left that door open, and of course expected to find it open upon his return.

So he did, but he found more.

Everything had worked well; he had not made a particle of noise that could be overheard; and now in a few moments he would be in his room again, and soon safe in bed and fast asleep.

Going to the top of the stair, he stepped boldly forward, long usage having made the act mechanical almost; but instead of stepping into his room as—knowing that he had left the door wide open—he expected to do, what was his horror to find himself in collision with a man.

The man was in the act of feeling his way out of the room, and they met with no gentle force; and as they came together something dropped to the floor and struck the sill with a loud, metallic ring.

Selina Peppertree, still wide awake, heard the sound, and sat up in bed with astonishing quickness. What was that? She immediately heard more, and enough more to frighten her almost into fits. Out of bed she bounded, grabbed up her little shawl, and put it into position over her shoulders, across her breast, and pinned behind, right over her flowing night-dress; and she was ready for business.

In the mean time, the two men had no sooner come together than they grappled, and the intruder hissed:

"Curse you! I'll fix you if you don't let go of me instantly!"

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" Mr. Boothman demanded, as he only held on the tighter.

"I'll show you," with an oath, "if you don't let go. I'll kill you."

Horatio Boothman was no weakling, but he was no match for his opponent, and in the struggle which immediately followed he got the worst of it. The intruder exerted his strength, and Mr. Boothman was flung back against the door with a loud crash.

It was at this moment that Selina Peppertree opened the door of her room and came out into the hall.

"Help! Fire! Thieves! Murder!" she screamed at the top of her voice.

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!" called Mr. Boothman, shrilly, "come to my help. I am like to be murdered. Help!"

"Oh! Murder! Help!" screamed Selina, and she boldly hurried down the stairs in the dark to take part in the battle.

"Curse you!" the intruder hissed again, this time more loudly than ever, and with horrible oaths, "will you let go of me!" and he gave Mr. Boothman such a shaking that he broke his hold.

Away the man sprung, and came into violent collision with the housekeeper, just as she turned the foot of the stair. Down went Selina, and on went the man, and he did not stop for anything then. Throwing open the front door, he was off like the wind.

But the housekeeper was too frightened and too badly shaken up to know where he was. Up she scrambled, just in time to collide with Mr. Boothman, and she laid hold upon him like a wildcat.

"Ho! Police! Help! Murder! Murder!" she shrieked, and her voice, the door now open, could be heard a block away.

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!" gasped Mr. Boothman, "let up, do let up. This is me."

Selina "let up" immediately, then, and together they rushed to the door and united their voices in the cry of "Police! police! police!"

The neighborhood was soon all excitement, and policemen were quickly on hand. The case was explained to them. The house was searched, but nothing was found except a big knife that lay near the door of Mr. Boothman's room. Was it a case of attempted murder? Be that as it might, there was no more sleep in that house that night.

CHAPTER XI.

AUNTY DEERFIELD'S CAPTIVE.

NEITHER Aunty Deerfield nor her house bore a savory reputation.

The one was known to be a bad woman, and a friend to all sorts of rascals and desperate characters; and the other was known to be a rendezvous for criminals of nearly every class.

It was to this woman and to this house that Elna Boothman had been taken.

Knowing this much, we can in a measure appreciate the girl's desperate situation.

As soon as Elna's abductors had gone from the house, Aunty Deerfield—for she the woman was—returned to the room where the poor girl was imprisoned, and said:

"Now, my little deary, you jest listen to me an' profit by what I say. You are in th' hands of Aunty Deerfield, you are, an' if you don't know who Aunty Deerfield is, she'll tell ye. I am a woman that don't stand no nonsense out o' any sich little pets as you be, an' you don't want ter forgit that. That is who Aunty Deerfield is. At any rate, that is enough for you ter know about her at present. Now you want ter stop that snivelin', an' that in a hurry, too; fer that is one of th' things that I hate worse'n p'izen."

The effect of this was to cause Elna to sob more than ever.

Stepping up to her, the woman tore her hands from her face, shook her not at all gently, and fiercely sibilated:

"Sa-ay, didn't you hear what I said? Stop that blubberin', this minnit, or it will be th' worse for ye. Now don't make any mistake about that. Here, let me mop yer eyes for ye."

Taking her apron in hand as she spoke, the hardened wretch roughly wiped away the girl's tears with it.

"Now, no more of that!" she added, sternly.

The silken gag was still in Elna's mouth, and the woman—if that name may be so misapplied—now untied it and took it out.

"Oh, woman, whoever you are," were the first words the girl uttered, "if you have one spark of womanly feeling in your heart, release me and let me go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" the Hecate laughed, "if it don't beat everything. I wonder where you little 'uns get that touchin' speech so pat. That is th' usual cry, that is, an' I have got so now that I look fer it reg'lar. I am a woman, my little dear, an' I have got a heart as big as a basket; but, at th' same time, there ain't no foolishness about me, an' sich soft talks as that don't amount to anything. Aunty Deerfield is clear old business, she is, right through and through."

"Why have I been brought here?" Elna demanded.

"Now you ask me too much," was the answer.

"You heard what was said as well as I did, an' mebbe you heard more, for what I know. All that I know about it is, that you are ter stay here till you are called for, an' if you ain't called for, then I shall consider you mine. That is all."

Elna had not stopped crying, for her tears ran down her face unceasingly, but she held back her sobs with no effort, afraid that the woman would treat her even worse than she had done already.

"I understand that you were to be paid for taking care of me, did I not?" she asked in us steady a voice as she could command.

"That was about it," the hateful creature admitted.

"Well, how much do you expect to get?"

"Ha, ha ha!" the old wretch laughed, "you are comin' at th' second stage of th' proceedin', I see. That is th' way they all do it. You want ter buy off now, don't ye; an' you will promise me no end o' money if I will only let ye go. Ha, ha, ha! It is th' same old game over ag'in."

"I do not know anything about that," was Elna's answer, "but I do know just how much money I have at my command, and if you wil set me free I promise you faithfully that you shall have every cent of it."

"Ha, here is a thought; mebby you have got some of it with ye," and with a look upon her face that frightened Elna, she leaned forward and began to search for her pocket, and readily found it.

Elna had her pocketbook with her, but there was less than a dollar in it, so the hawk-eyed bag did not get much for her pains.

"Humph! it isn't much," she grunted. "but every little helps, an' I won't throw it away."

"You are welcome to it," said Elna, "and you will be just as welcome to much more if you will only let me go."

"Yes, I suppose so. Little wax dolls like you never tell no stories, I don't reckon. Where do you live, and where do you keep yer boddle?"

Elna was wise enough not to answer the questions.

"If you will not believe me, and cannot trust me," she returned, "I certainly shall not trust you, now that I know you better."

"Why, my little rosebud, you have got sense, haven't you," the woman complimented, with a hideous grin. "You ain't as soft as I took you to be. But, that don't matter. You are welcome to yer money, if you have got any—which I doubt; and you will stay right here with me jest the same."

"Well, if you will not do anything else for me," said Elna, now gaining control over her feelings and speaking more clearly, "please loosen these cords upon my wrists. They are cutting me, as you can see."

"My dear, I'll do that with pleasure," the old vulture promised, with another of her hideous smiles. "I will take them off entirely. You cannot harm any one nor anything here, and if you want to harm yourself you are welcome to do that. Here, hold out your lily-whites, an' I'll free 'em."

Elna held out her hands gladly enough, and, true to her promise, the she-tiger took a knife from her pocket and cut the cords off.

"Thank you," Elna said; "that is a great relief."

"No need ter thank me a' tall, pretty one, no need ter thank me a' tall. I would not do it if it would give you any advantage, but, as it don't, there's no harm done. That chain to your foot will hold stronger chickens nor what you be. Only a week ago it held a damsel that was twice your strength, an' she didn't git away, you bet she didn't. Ha, ha, ha! they don't git away when Aunty Deerfield gits hold of 'em, nary time."

The woman's manner terrified Elna more than her words, and she grew more and more afraid of her each moment.

Evidently the hardened creature saw this, or else she had a point to gain, for she suddenly changed her manner and became more gentle—or tried to become so, at any rate.

"There; there," she said, "I reckon I have been talkin' too rough-like to you, an' you ain't used ter it. I won't ask you yet how much money you kin pay me if I let you go, but I will keep it in mind an' think of it, an' if—"

"Oh! I will tell you gladly enough how much I can give you," cried Elna, mistaking the woman completely; "I can give you more than two hundred dollars, and all my own, too. Say that you will let me go, please say that you will."

"Two hundred dollars, eh? Well, that is a tidy sum, an' no jumpin' over it. I will keep that in mind, an' think on't. I must know more about you, though, afore I kin think o' lettin' you go out o' my hands. What is yer name?"

Completely deceived, and with a spark of hope kindled in her breast, Elna was only too glad to answer.

"My name is Elna Boothman," she returned.

"That's a pretty name, I'm sure; I'll try an' remember it. Where do you live, Elna?"

This brought the girl back to the question she had refused to answer before, and the same suspicion returned.

"I prefer not to answer that," she said.

The old scorpion bit her lip, but passed quickly on.

"Oh, well, that don't matter," she observed, carelessly, "that don't matter a' tall. Of course you have parents who would be glad to add another hundred to that neat little sum o' yours, in case I do agree ter let you slip through my fingers, eh?"

"I have no parents," Elna replied, "but I have a brother who—"

She broke suddenly down, and could go no

further. The recollection of Paul non-appearance that evening, and the awful suspicion she had had that he had met with foul play, rushed back upon her, and her tears sprung forth anew.

This brought the anger of the virago down upon her again, and her tongue ran riot for some moments.

"You would not blame me if you only knew," Elna said, when she could speak at all.

"If I only knew what?" the wretch snapped.

"I have fears that my brother is dead."

"Ha! is that so? And what puts that in your head?"

"I fear the same persons who brought me here, and who say they intend to kill me, have already killed him."

Again her tears sprung forth, and as though with another point in view, the old serpent did not this time upbraid her.

"Who is this brother of yours?" she presently asked.

"His name is Paul Boothman, and he is a letter-carrier."

"And you think he has been killed, eh?"

"That is what I greatly fear."

"An' what is it that makes you think so? Come, little 'un, if you want me to help you out o' yer trouble, you must show yourself more friendly with me. Let's hear yer story."

Elna went ahead, and told all that she thought prudent to tell, for now she had little or no hope that the woman would show any mercy toward her.

The wretch listened attentively until she had done, and then burst into a laugh.

"Well, that was cute on Hardcroft's part—mighty cute," she chuckled, "an' it does me good ter hear it. He is a great one ter bag game, is that same Hardcroft, an' he bagged you about as neat as could be. But he ain't none too clever for Aunty Deerfield, nary time he ain't. There is more in this game than I see yet, but you bet, my lassie, that he will come down heavy afore he gets you out o' my hands; you bet he will. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you won't let me go?" Elna queried.

"Let you go!" the thing repeated, as she rose to leave the room; "well, hardly. There's money ter be had out o' you, little 'un, whether you know it or not, an' I am goin' ter have some of it. Let you go! Oh, yes, I am full o' that! Ha, ha, ha!"

Elna's hope had been very faint, and now it was dashed to the ground. She sunk down in despair.

"You kin go to bed, or do what you please," the old sinner remarked, when she opened the door to go out. "I will lock this door, an' nobody won't come in here till I come back in the mornin'. You can't git away; that is out o' th' question; an' if you ain't altogether a fool, you will go ter bed, an' go ter sleep."

With that she went out, and Elna heard the key turn in the lock. There was indeed no hope that she could escape from the place, and her heart was ready to burst with mingled grief, anxiety, fear, and other emotions combined.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT LETTER FROM LONDON.

JABEZ ROGERTON took the letter from his son's hand with eager haste.

He looked at the superscription.

"This is what we are after, lad," he said in a gleeful tone, "this is what we are after, sure enough."

"I thought there could be no mistake about it, when I saw that it had come from over the pond," the son returned.

"No, there is no mistake, and we are on the winning side just as sure as you live."

"Well, dad, open it and let's hear what it has to say."

"Yes, lad, yes; only give me a little time. Say, just hang something over that keyhole, will you? We do not want any prowling eyes around here now, or ears, either, for that matter. Not that there is likely to be any, but we will be on the sure side."

Dunlap rose and hung something over the knob of the door, so that the keyhole was covered, and pushed the mat close up against the door at the bottom.

"There, that will block everything of that sort," he declared; "and now let's hear that letter. You were in a deuce of a hurry, when I came in, to know what I had to tell; and now I am in the same impatience. Turn about is fair play."

"All right, all right. Turn up that gas a little, now, and then sit down and open your ears."

Dunlap turned up the gas with an impatient movement, and resumed his seat in a ruffled temper.

"Anything else you want?" he snapped.

"Keep cool, my boy, keep cool," admonished the father; "we will investigate the thing now."

As he spoke he tore the letter open, and drew forth the sheet it contained and spread it out.

"Draw up close," he said, "for I shall read in a low tone."

"I can hear you."

The letter was dated from London, and as Jabez Rogerton read it, in a tone a little above a whisper, it ran as follows:

"MR. HORATIO BOOTHMAN,
New York City.

"DEAR SIR:—

"Your letter of inquiry has been received by us. It is with pleasure that we hasten a reply. We have been looking everywhere to find the woman you mention, as a great amount of wealth is held for her or her rightful heirs. The following information is cheerfully given: Loyal Boothman and Rhoda Rogerton were married May 25th, 1862, in London. They went to the United States in the same year, and remained there. Mr. Boothman was an American. Miss Rogeron was a native of England, a daughter of the late Sir Adam Rogerton. The genealogy of this family can be traced through several generations. If we can be of any further service to you in this line, it will give us pleasure to help you.

"Having responded to your inquiries, we would respectfully ask some information in return. You state that Loyal Boothman was your brother, and that both he and his wife are dead. Did they leave any children? If so, this property is theirs. If no heirs are living then it will go to charitable institutions, as the will of the late Mr. Rogerton decrees. Please favor us with a prompt response.

"You further mention that you learned of us through one Jabez Rogerton, of your city. We know of him. He is a son of the late Sir Adam by a first marriage. His name is not mentioned in the will, and he is therefore disinherited.

"Very truly and respectfully yours,

"CLAPPERHILL AND BUTTERTON."

After the reading of the letter the father and son looked at each other for fully a minute before either of them spoke.

The son was the first to break the silence.

"How much is there of that boodle?" he asked.

"A quarter of a million dollars, at least," Jabez answered.

"Whew! that will be a haul. We must not let that slip through our fingers, old man. We must move the very earth, if necessary, to get out grip upon it."

"Does it look as though we meant to fool about it? The greatest step of all has been taken; that is, the disposing of the heirs."

"That is so; but what about that man Boothman? Won't he be in our road?"

"I have been thinking about him, and I will take care of him."

"Say, let's go over this whole business once more, dad, so I can get it into my head in dead sure shape. I want to have it down pat, you know. By the way, how is it that the old man did not leave you anything?"

"Dunlap, I will go over it with you as often as you desire. You have your part to play, and you must be posted on every side. Now for your question, which I will answer first."

As he was speaking, the engraver returned the letter to its envelope, put it into his pocket, and after discharging a load of tobacco juice at the heap of dirt in the corner, resumed:

"My mother," he went on, "was, from what I have heard about her, no angel. I barely remember her. My father parted from her after they had been married only a short time. She returned to her family, and I was born with them. When I was about five years old she died, and then my father took me to live with him. A little later he married again, and this time a lady in his own station in life. The issue of the second marriage was a daughter, the Rhoda mentioned in this letter. When I was twelve years of age, I was sent away to school. That I did not like. At the age of fourteen I ran away from the school, returned home by night, broke into the house, robbed my father of all the ready money I could find, and set out to see the world on my own hook. In less than a week I was captured and returned, and then was sent to a reform school. There I was obliged to learn engraving, and finding that I had a liking for it, I soon became a good workman."

"Quite a good beginning," remarked Dunlap, as the father paused to discharge his tobacco gun at the dirt heap again; "you are a pater to be proud of and no error about that."

"Right you are, my boy," the engraver assented. And he continued:

"I served full time at school, and then went to London and followed my trade, and at the age of twenty-five I held second place to no engraver in that city. I made big money but spent it as fast as I made it, about as you do, my lad; and I was a boy among the boys, I tell you. The more I earned and the more I spent, however, the more I wanted to spend; and my income could not keep pace with my out-go at all. Then I began to have an eye toward my father's wealth, and wished that half-sister of mine had never been born. She held first place in his affection by long odds. How could I dispose of her in some mild way?"

"About that time I met an American artist, the Loyal Boothman mentioned in this letter. He was a handsome fellow. I knew that father hated everything American. I introduced the fellow to my half-sister, and fanned their acquaintance into a first-class love affair. He asked for her hand, and the old man forbade him the house. I assisted them to elope, and they married in spite of him. Father would not

have anything to do with them, and they came to this country. Then I began to work my own points. I went down to see the old gentleman, and while there braced him for a loan. You see I had run sadly into debt. He fired up at once. Some one had posted him as to my income, and when he found that I had spent it all, and more, he turned me off."

"You have a fortune in your art," was what he said; "go and make it and hold fast to it. You need none of my money, and you will get none of it. You have all the bad qualities of your mother's tribe in you, and none of her few redeeming traits!"

"Rather severe on my grandmother," remarked Dunlap.

"But it was the truth," Jabez affirmed. "I had learned all about that family, and they were a bad lot. You see we are both in the same boat, my boy, and I can be frank with you. Well, after their boy was born, Rhoda and her husband returned to England on a visit, and the old man took her right into his heart, her and her husband, too; and my case was settled. If it was not, I soon put on the finishing touch. Pressed hard for a large sum of money, I robbed the old man again, making a big haul, and unfortunately was detected as before. I had nothing to do but get out of the country, and here I am."

"Well, go on."

"I am going on. A few years ago the old man died, and I learned that he had left his whole fortune to Rhoda or her heirs. I was cut off without even the fabled shilling. But Rhoda could not be found. I had lost track of her, and there the money lay, idle. I could not get hold of it, and it was rusting for want of some one to spend it."

"It won't suffer that way much longer."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should say not. But, let me conclude. A short time ago a man came here to see me and inquired about the Rogerton family. He let out his business. He was this Horatio Boothman, brother to Loyal Boothman. I learned that Rhoda Rogerton is dead, but that she had two children living. I saw this fortune in prospect. My visitor knows nothing about it. I let him go ahead, telling him whom to write to, and armed him right up to the teeth. Then I began to plot against him and the heirs. Now you have it all in a nutshell."

"And now the delicate part of the business begins."

"Exactly so. But, we need have nothing to fear. You are henceforth Paul Boothman, and that girl, Sallie Truffles, must play the role of Eliza Boothman. Then to establish your identity, my trade will come in handy. Bogus documents can be made up, and, doing the business from Chicago, we shall experience little trouble. We will write to Clapperhill and Butterton in the name of Horatio Boothman, telling them that the heirs are in Chicago, and giving them the name of some shyster lawyer there. We will fix it with him, and in a little time we shall handle the rocks. It is a big thing my lad, a big thing."

"And you have no paternal compunctions about my changing my name?"

"Not the least. That is part of the scheme, and you have little or nothing to lose by it, while we have both a fortune to gain. The name I have given you is nothing to be proud of, when you recall my history. The only thing about it that might trouble my conscience, if I had any, is the fact that you will be pretty certain to disgrace your new name; for you are your dad right over again."

"Thank you," drawled the young man, with mock politeness; "I am proud of my inheritance."

"Well you may be, too; that is, of your inheritance of brain. A fellow of only ordinary intellect could never have climbed from this miserable studio to the plane you are riding on."

"And which side of the tree does the brain come from?"

"Certainly not from your mother's, for she was from even a worse tribe than your grandmother's; and it could hardly have come from her. I guess we shall have to credit our wit to the Rogerton stock, my boy."

"Well, I am willing to do that."

"By the way, have you seen that Sallie Truffles?"

"Well, rather," Dunlap drawled. "I have only had one interview about our little scheme, however. I guess she is ready to go into it with us."

"Good! Oh, we shall get there, my boy; get there with both feet."

"It will be strange if we don't, that is all."

They talked on for some time, laying out the details of their devilish plot, and when Dunlap went away the hour was late.

What was to come out of it all?

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN Paul Boothman crept out from his place of hiding under the stair, to follow the two men with their prisoner, he picked up the

short, strong stick that had previously been employed to hold the prisoner in a doubled-up position.

It was a heavy piece of wood, and looked as though it might at some time or other have been a policeman's night-stick.

If so, it was now only about half as long as it had been originally.

This thought came to the Prince as he gripped it in his hand, and he realized that he had got hold of a good weapon for a fight at close quarters, and it little mattered what the stick was or had been.

Silently and cautiously the postman, taking his first step in his new role of detective, followed after the two men and their prisoner, his revolver still in his right hand and his new weapon in his left.

For the present his only plan was to follow and to keep from being discovered; but, as he at the same time realized, that would not help the prisoner any, if he did no more; he must act!

But, when would be the best opportunity? Should he attack them in the tunnel as they walked along, or wait till they had reached the cellar from which he had so wonderfully escaped?

He hardly knew which to do. In the tunnel there was scant room for a fight, and if he used his revolver there he was likely to hit the prisoner. On the other hand, if he waited till they came to the cellar the two men would have all the advantage of the best position, and would be more at liberty to handle themselves.

He decided in favor of making the attack in the tunnel.

Next he considered the detail of his plan, and soon had it in mind to his satisfaction.

Increasing his pace, in a moment he was only a few feet behind them.

His heart was beating fast with excitement, but he was cool; his nerves were steady, and his muscles were strung for action.

Keeping step with the man ahead of him, there was little danger that he would be discovered, and everything was now ready for him to make his attack.

The Prince's plan was to deal the man in the rear a crushing blow on the head, and have his revolver ready to present at the head of the other rascal when he turned. It was a good course, and the chances were all in favor of its success.

Before he could—or at any rate before he did—put it into operation—something else happened.

Paul was waiting for them to come to the walls of the cellars, and had decided to make his attack at the place where the tunnel made the sharp turn around one corner of the cellar that extended back further than the rest.

Just when they came to the wall of that cellar, however, the prisoner made a move in his own behalf. Coming to a sudden stop, he lifted his right leg with a movement as quick as lightning, planted his foot in the middle of the back of the man ahead of him, and sent him sprawling forward against the wall with terrible force.

At the same instant almost, the man behind the prisoner took in his design, and was raising his weapon to fire, when the club that Prince Paul had in hand came down upon his head with crushing force, and he was dropped senseless to the ground.

No sooner than Paul heard the prisoner moving away along the tunnel at a rapid pace, in spite of the darkness.

Of course the lamp had been extinguished at the very first, and now nothing could be seen.

"Hello!" Paul cried out. "Hello, prisoner! I am a friend to the rescue. Come back!"

"You are, eh?" hissed a voice at his feet.

"Take that!"

There was the flash and report of a pistol, and a bullet barely missed the head of the plucky Prince.

Paul threw himself upon the man immediately, and, after a brief struggle, the handy club had laid him out as senseless as his companion.

"Come back, friend," Paul called again then; "the rascals are laid out for the time being, and I will free you."

He knew that the man was gagged, and so did not expect any response.

By listening, though, he satisfied himself that he was not moving any further away, and called again to doubly reassure him.

Feeling around the narrow space, Paul soon had the satisfaction to find the lamp which one of the fallen rascals had carried, and upon examining it, as well as he could in the dark, was assured that it had not suffered material damage by its rough fall.

But he had no means of lighting it. He had plenty of matches, but owing to the bath he had had they were worse than useless.

He did not lack for ideas, however. He thought of the two senseless men at his feet, and immediately went for their pockets.

Fortune favored his search, for in the first pocket into which he stuck his fingers, he found what he wanted.

It was but the work of a moment to light one

of the matches, and apply it to the wick of the lamp, and the tunnel was once more illuminated.

Glancing at the fallen men to make sure that they were safe for the time being, Paul's next move was to go on around the bend in the tunnel in quest of the man whom he had assisted to escape.

At the second corner he met him.

"Don't have any doubt about me," the postman assured, "for I am your friend—for the present, at least, no matter who you are. Here, let me relieve you of that gag and also of these cords that bind your hands and arms."

Taking his knife from his pocket, Paul quickly cut the gag and the cords, and the man was freed.

"Partner, accept my thanks," were the first words the man uttered. "I was in a deuced bad fix, and I guess it would have been all up with me had it not been for you. But what about those rascals? Are they dead?"

"No, only senseless," Prince answered.

"Let's get back to them, then, before they come to. We don't want the work to do over again."

They turned and started back.

"You don't owe me much in the way of thanks," observed Paul, returning to that; "for you were helping yourself pretty well when I took a hand in the game."

"I was taking a desperate chance," declared the other. "I expected a bullet in my back the moment I did it. It was death one way or the other, though, so it did not matter. I had one chance in a thousand, as it were, and I meant to use it."

"And you did well," Paul complimented. "Not every man would have thought of it."

"In my business a man has to have his thinker in handy working order at all times," the other remarked.

"May I inquire what your business is?" asked the carrier.

"Yes; and since now I recognize you, and know what your own is, I will tell you. I am a detective."

"A detective?"

"Yes; my name is Harpers. You are Prince Paul, the Postman."

Paul was amazed. Had he been instrumental in saving the life of one of the best-known and best detectives in New York? It did not seem possible. He had never seen Harpers before to his knowledge, and yet the detective knew him and had spoken his name.

The detective smiled as he read in a measure Paul's thoughts.

"I see I have surprised you," he said. "It need not surprise you at all. I know many men who do not know me, and you were one of them. I was not sure of you at first, but when I saw your uniform, and heard you talk, I placed you at once."

"And where had you seen me before?"

"I once had the—ought I say pleasure?—of shadowing you for two days on your route, when the authorities were after that man Ruggles."

"Is it possible! Then I was suspected?" in a tone that showed how keenly the young man felt it.

"More than twenty of you were watched before we got the right man," was the reply. "But, do not let that worry you," was added, "for many of the very best men of New York have been under surveillance in their time, did they but know it. In search of truth, Justice is no respecter of persons."

The detective was as cool now as though nothing had happened.

"How is it you are so matter-of-fact in your manner, so soon after your escape from so great a danger?" the carrier could not help but ask.

The detective smiled.

"That is passed," he answered. "It is now merely an event. I was in danger; now I am out of danger. That is all there is to it. The only thing that remains is, that I am under obligations to you. If I can ever do you a good turn, do not hesitate to let me know it. You will find that I am not ungrateful."

"Thank you. Here we are, where we left your enemies. They are still unconscious. What shall we do with them?"

"We will bind their hands and feet, and then we will step beyond their hearing and have a talk. I am eager to learn how you came here; what you are doing so wet; in fact, all about your adventure. I am sure you have had one."

"You are right, I have," Paul assented. "I will tell you, and then should be glad to know how you came to be in such a fix."

"You shall be told. Just take charge of that fellow, and I will do the same for this one."

In a little while the two men were bound, and that done, Paul and his friend retired to a little distance and continued their talk.

The Prince told his story, to which the detective listened with deepest interest, and as he concluded Paul put the question:

"And now, what do you think of it?"

"In taking your case in a professional way," was the deliberate answer, "I would ask many questions and draw careful deductions; but, in answering as friend to friend, judging from what you have told me, I will say: You have

an enemy, and one who seeks your life. Be on your guard every moment!"

"Thanks," returned Paul. "And now for your story," he added.

The detective told something of his adventure, but as it does not concern our romance we will state it briefly. He was after a man, and had ventured into a very tigers' den. By a mishap his disguise had been penetrated, and before he could get out he was overpowered and bound. He was stripped of his disguise, and when it was made known who he was, his death was demanded. His fate settled, he was handed over to two of the men present, and what they did with him has been shown.

Paul was an attentive listener, and when the detective had done, he observed:

"You had a narrow escape. It seems that we have been thrown together to save and help each other. Certain it is that we both came near the same awful fate."

CHAPTER XIV.

LIKE RATS IN A TRAP.

DANTON HARPERS was, as we have intimated, one of the best detectives in New York.

He was—have we described him?—only about thirty years of age, but had already won distinction. He was a little under the medium in height, but was well-made and heavy, and was decidedly active and strong. He was rather good-looking. His face was clearly lined, and was stern and determined in expression. His eyes were keen, bright, and full of fire.

Free as the two men now were, Paul Boothman and Harpers would have been a bad pair for any set of rascals to tackle.

They had both come near sharing the same fate, and both had had a narrow escape from death.

"You are right, when you say that," Harpers agreed, continuing the conversation, and responding to Paul's last remark; "but a miss is as good as a mile, the saying is, so we are none the worse for wear."

"I have been asking myself what your plan could have been when you kicked the fellow in the back as you did, and started off. That is, what you intended to do, if you got off without being shot."

"Well, it was no regular plan at all," was the answer. "It was a desperate strike for liberty, and after making the first move, I would have had to be guided by circumstances for the rest. The chances were against me, but it was better to risk it, than to submit tamely to being killed. I reasoned like this: When I kicked the first man down the light would be put out instantly, and perhaps the man would be rendered senseless for a time. I would hurry on ahead, trusting to luck, and if I escaped the bullet that I surely expected would come speeding after me, I would stop, allow the other man to come up to me, and give him a kick in the same manner as the first. If I overcame them, so much the better for me; if not I would be no worse off than I had been at first."

"There was a chance for you, at any rate," observed Paul.

"Yes, even though a slim one. But, at the best, I would have still been in a bad fix, for I would have had to wander around here with my hands tied, trusting to dumb luck to get out."

"By the way," the Prince hastened to remind, at that point, "hadn't we better be getting out now if we can?"

"Right you are," the detective sided immediately; "we have no further business here."

"What about our prisoners?"

"We will leave them here."

"Will they be found?"

"Most assuredly. Somebody from the den I was in will come to look for them when they have been absent unusually long, and there will be a surprise."

"I should think so. They will think that Danton Harpers is more of a terror than they ever dreamed of."

"They will wonder, no doubt, at first sight, how I got free; but the prisoners will soon tell them, when they come to."

"And that will let them know that I am alive."

"Not necessarily. They did not see your face—in fact did not see you at all, and they will not know who it was attacked them."

"That is true, too; and perhaps they know nothing about the men who attacked me, and know nothing about my case."

"Perhaps not; but they are all members of one clan, that is pretty certain. The fact that all of them know about this tunnel proves that."

"Yes, that is plain."

"Did you often have letters for the house in which you were entrapped?"

"No; in fact, I do not remember that I ever had one for that house before the one to-night."

"That looks significant. It was clearly a decoy letter to lead you into the trap."

"Yes, but whether it was me they wanted, or whether they were after some letter I had, I cannot settle in my mind. Did I tell you that one of the rascals took a letter—perhaps two or more—after they had bound me? He did, and threw the rest into a corner."

"Hal that looks a little queer, too. But, how could they have any idea what letters you had in hand? Perhaps they took out the registered ones."

"I happened to have none."

"Strange, very!"

"So I look at it. If they wanted only letters, though, why try to kill me? If they were after letters, they got what they wanted; but if they wanted to dispose of me, they are badly fooled, as they will find out."

"What are you going to do?" the detective asked.

"I intend to hunt them down, and settle the account with them. They shall not have another chance to do such a thing, if I can help it."

"Going to turn detective, eh? Well, my opinion of you is that you will make a good one. Are you not going back to your work, then?"

"Not until I have had a chance at these fellows. I came very near not being able ever to return, and I guess the Department can spare me."

"If you report your case, though, the post-office inspector will take hold of it, and you will have very little room to work on your own account. Why not let them think you dead? That will give you all the more field to work in, for you will not then have to disclose your clews, and the rascals will be less weary."

Paul was thoughtful. He did not see his way clear yet. He would be able to give the matter more careful thought later on, when he had got out of his present dilemma and had let his sister know that he was safe.

Little did he imagine the truth.

"I will have to think it all over," the Prince returned; and added:

"But, come, let's try to get out of here, for I am anxious to get home. My sister will think I am dead, or something as bad."

"Well, whatever you do," the detective concluded, "don't forget that if you need help or advice, Harpers is ready to give you both. Now let's move. You said you tried to get out through the cellar, did you not?"

"Yes; but found the door locked."

"Did you try to force it?"

"Not then."

"Then we will go there and see what we can do with it. If we have to force our way through that den through which I came, we shall have fun. Lead on, as you have the light."

Without paying any further attention to their prisoners, the two young men started along the tunnel, Paul carrying the light and leading the way.

In a little time they were at the door of the cellar.

"Here we are," announced the guide.

"Yes," responded the detective, stopping short, "but I have made a mistake, or rather forgotten something, and cannot go further until I have set it right. Our talk knocked it out of mind."

"What is that?"

"I have forgotten my weapons. Those two fellows back there have them, and I must return and get them. You see a detective is forgetful as well as others."

"Well, come on," with perhaps a little show of impatience, "and we will get them as soon as we can."

Back they went, and when they came near to the place where they had left the two men, Harpers told Paul to stop and he would go on alone.

Taking the lamp, the detective stepped forward to where the men lay, and found that they had now come to.

"How do you like it?" he asked, as he stooped and relieved them of his weapons and their own as well. "You thought you had me dead to rights, didn't you? But there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, as the old adage runs. I hope you rest easy, and that you won't take cold. Ta-ta!"

With that he left them and returned to the Prince, and both went back to the door of the cellar—the detective still carrying the lamp.

Paul opened the door, and they passed into the dismal place from which he had recently made his escape.

"There is the hole where they put me down into the water," the carrier explained, pointing to the trap in the floor.

It could now be seen, of course, as Paul had thrown it open in getting out, and by so doing had displaced the earth on its top.

"I thought of covering it up, but had no light."

"It would be a good idea," the detective agreed, "and we can do it now. There is a shovel."

"I'll do it," and taking up the shovel Paul set to work.

It did not take him long, and when he threw the shovel down the earth was lying over the door smooth and level.

"If we get out of here without their seeing us," observed Harpers, "no one of them can ever have a suspicion that you have escaped. That is, not until you make it known to them."

"They'll find it out then. But, here is the stair. Come on."

Paul went up ahead, and Harpers followed with the lamp.

"The door is as fast as can be," the Prince announced, when he reached the top. "It is as I found it before. Give me the lamp, and see what you can do with it."

Harpers handed over the light, and tried the door. It was only too well fastened. It looked as though there was no hope for escape in that direction.

The detective examined it. The lock was on the other side, and the key did not protrude. There seemed to be, to the inexperienced eye, no possible way of opening it, unless by breaking through.

That was not to be thought of, except as a last resort.

"I'll see what I can do with it," observed the detective, as he took a curious tool from one of his pockets. "I think we can make a hole in the door without much trouble, and then we can put a band through and turn the key. There is many a trick, you see, Prince."

The tool he held was one of the handy little combination sets, having a gimlet, a chisel, a saw, a file, a blade, a screw-driver, etc., all in one handle.

Opening the gimlet-blade, he was about to bore a hole in which to get a start with the saw, when a door was heard to open, and the tread of a dozen feet was heard!

The two young men drew back at once, realizing that their escape was cut off.

At about the same time the sound of angry voices came to them from along the tunnel, and they saw that they were in a bad place.

They were caught like rats in a trap.

CHAPTER XV.

A KNIGHTED PRINCE.

"Are you armed?" was the first thing the detective asked.

"Yes; I have a revolver and this club."

"Good! It looks as though we were going to see some lively times before we get out of this. If it comes to a fight you must make every shot tell."

"Count on me for that," Paul assured.

"We shall have to give up the thought of going out this way. There are too many of them up there for us. It is better to avoid them if we can. I have an idea this other party is smaller."

"What about that den at the other end of the tunnel?"

"That is a bad one, but I know the way there, and we can go through with a rush, once we get past these fellows."

Harpers closed the tool he had been using, while talking, and now the two descended the stair.

At the bottom they stopped to decide what should be done next.

The voices in the tunnel were coming nearer each moment, and they were high and angry. The escape was known, and now they were hot after the blood of the detective and his unknown rescuer.

The Prince was excited but cool. It was an excitement that he liked. It sent the blood tingling through his veins, and he was eager for the fight. Every nerve was steady, and his muscles were ready for action. He had found his true vocation at last.

The detective held the lamp and looked at him, smiled, and asked:

"Have you anything to suggest?"

"I have, and it is this: We ought to stand near the door there, and when those fellows rush in, as they will, we can dodge out."

"A good idea!"

There was little time to say more, for the men were now near at hand, so they put themselves into position as quickly as possible, and waited.

In the mean time they had not been inattentive to the footsteps overhead. It seemed that there must be a dozen men in the party, at least. They had come along the hall, and had entered a room in the rear.

Their voices could be heard, but mingled with the others in the tunnel no words could be distinguished.

Only a brief time did the men remain in that rear room. They were soon in the hall again, and, to the surprise of the two men in the cellar, threw open the cellar door and descended the stairs.

Had there been time for them to study it, Prince Paul and his companion could no doubt soon have guessed the truth. All these men were after them!

Something bad happened that they had not counted on.

When their two prisoners, the two men who had bad the detective in their power, and who were going to murder him, were left alone, it was thought that they were securely bound. And so they were. But, lying close together, they were in position to render help to each other, and lost no time in doing so. They were unconscious a very much shorter time than had been thought.

With his teeth, one had set to work to free the other, and when the detective went back to them to get his weapons, the task was nearly done. It was accomplished in a very few mo-

ments afterward, and one of the fellows hastened to the "den" at the end of the tunnel to give the alarm.

The result is seen. One party of men entered the tunnel, while another had hastened around to the connecting house on the other street, and it was their intention to catch the detective and his companion between them and put them to death.

Two or three of those coming down the stair had lights, which it had been their errand into the rear room to procure, and lights were seen in the tunnel at about the same time.

Paul and his partner were standing close to the tunnel door, one on each side, ready to spring out as soon as the men should come in, but as luck would have it the men on the stair were there first, and discovery could not be avoided.

The Prince was quick to realize this, and, regardless of what Harpers might think about it, he raised his revolver and fired.

Down fell one fellow's arm, and one light was extinguished.

The detective was not slow to follow. He fired, and another of the men came tumbling headlong to the floor, carrying with him the one ahead.

Only one light remained.

Of course the two trapped men could consider these men as their enemies, even had they had no proof of it; but, they had the proof. As the cellar door had been flung open, one of their number had exclaimed:

"If the dogs are here, plug them on sight! Show them no quarter."

There was no room now for doubt concerning their intentions.

In another moment the other men bounded in through the door, the firing having caused them to increase their speed to a run.

All was confusion, then, for the two parties, and before they could recover from it Paul and Harpers had sprung out and jerked the door shut after them.

There were heavy bars on the door, one on each side, so that it could be fastened against either direction, and the moment the door was closed Paul shoved the bar on that side into its place and their enemies were for the time being cut off.

"Good! mighty good!" cried the detective.

"You have all the snap of an old hand at this business."

"We have snapped the rascals in their own trap, anyhow," returned the postman, "and we must profit by our chance."

"Right you are," the detective agreed. "Come on, as fast as you can. I see through it all now. One of those fellows must have got away, and gave the alarm. They came two ways upon us, in order to trap us. But, ha, ha, ha! they have got it on the wrong foot."

"But, how did he escape?" asked Paul.

"One helped the other, I suppose," the detective rightly surmised. "Or, perhaps another one has followed them and found them bound. No matter, the result was the same."

While this was being said, they were hastening along at their best speed, and their two prisoners were not to be seen.

"Gone!" ejaculated the Prince.

"Yes, and with a story to tell," added the detective.

Just then they heard the heavy blows of an ax upon the door behind them, and knew that they should soon have their enemies at their heels.

"They'll be after us before we get out," decided Harpers, as he pushed on as fast as he dared in such a place.

"Yes," assented the carrier, "and part of their band will cut around to head us off. We have got to hustle."

And hustle they did, too.

They came to the bends in the tunnel, dashed around them, and then headed away toward the home end—so to say.

Before they came there they saw a light ahead.

"Blocked!" cried Harpers.

"I don't think so," demurred the Prince.

"They haven't had time to get around."

"They may have a telephone from one house to the other."

"That's so; didn't think of that."

At sight of the light they had slowed up, but they still pushed forward. They carried their own light yet.

"I am not going to stop," averred Paul. "I am going out of here this time if I have to climb out over dead men!"

"Good!" cried the detective; "I am with you. We'll go through it if it takes a wheel off."

They were now coming near the end of the tunnel, and had their weapons all in readiness.

Suddenly a voice hailed them, coming from the foot of the stair, where the light was seen.

"Did ye ketch 'em?" was the inquiry made.

The Prince was quick to respond.

"Yes," he shouted back, "you bet we did, an' we done fer 'em, too. Go on back, there's no need ter come."

"All right; th' door is open."

"All right," returned Paul, and he and his companion pushed straight on.

They saw the light ahead move, saw it ascend, and then it went out of sight from where they were.

"That was a capital bluff," the detective complimented in a low tone, as they hastened along.

"I thought it might work."

"It couldn't have been done better."

In another moment they were at the foot of the stair, and hurried up without a second's delay.

The detective took the lead.

At the top of the stair was a small room, with two doors leading from it. No one was there, but many voices could be heard in the main room right adjoining.

The two men did not try to move about without noise, but rather made plenty of it, as though they were right at home there.

"This way," the detective spoke in a half-whisper, and he turned to the door at the right; "that one leads into the saloon."

Paul followed, and they were immediately in a long, narrow hall, in the front end of which a lamp was burning dimly.

They of course strode forward at a rapid pace toward the street door, observing no caution further than to keep their weapons ready, and to have their eyes well about them.

They had gone two-thirds the length of the hall, perhaps, when the door at the rear opened and a voice called to them.

"Hey! where ye goin'?"

"Come on an' see, or wait a minnit till we come back," was Paul's prompt answer.

"Who is it?" was demanded.

Harpers was by this time at the front door, and throwing back the spring, had it open.

"We are Danton Harpers the detective and partner," he called, and, as the words were uttered, he and Paul sprung out upon the street!

"This way!" cried the Prince, as he started down the street on a run, and Harpers was right at his heels.

Knowing that their enemies would come the shorter way around the block, Paul had chosen the longer, and in a few minutes he and his new-made friend were out of all danger, from pursuit and paused, panting, beneath a powerful electric light on the corner.

"You are a trumpl!" exclaimed the Rogue's Terror, slapping the bedraggled Paul on the back. "I owe my life to you, and I shall not forget it. More than that, I am going to add another title to your name. Allow me, Prince, to knight you The Postman Detective!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PAUL SURPRISED AND ALARMED.

COMING from such a man as Harpers, that was no slight compliment; but, it had little effect upon the brave letter-carrier.

"I thank you for such a compliment, undeserved," he said, "but I think you had better not proclaim it abroad, for I may not prove myself worthy of your good opinion."

"One fair sample is enough for me," returned Harpers. "You have shown what you are made of. Well, I suppose you are going right home, are you not?"

"Yes. I shall go there first of all. I know my sister must be terribly alarmed about me, and I must relieve her mind. After that I shall, perhaps, report my case. I have not decided what to do about that."

"Will you do me a favor?" Harpers asked.

"Certainly," the Prince promised.

"You do not ask what it is."

"I do not suppose it is anything unreasonable."

"Well, you may judge of that. The favor I would ask is this: Will you please let two days elapse before you report your case?"

"This is rather a strange request; I cannot understand your object in it."

"No, of course not. But, as you have said yourself, if you had not got out of that hole you could never report, and two days can make little difference."

"You are right in that," agreed Paul; "but at the same time I do not like the idea of binding myself not to do a certain thing, when circumstances may make it highly important that I should do that very thing."

"Well, you are right in that, too. I will modify my request. Will you let me know before you do report the matter?"

"Yes, I can promise to do that, if you will tell me where to find you."

"That is necessary, of course. Here are my cards. One will show you where my office is, and the other will tell you where I board."

The Prince took the cards, and as he could not put them into his pocket, carried them in his hand.

The detective added further information about his office hours, and by that time they were at the place where they had to part company, as their ways lay in opposite directions.

"By the way, you have not told me where you live," reminded the detective, as they were about parting.

The postman informed him, and after a hearty

hand-shake, and assurances of friendship on both sides, they separated.

It was by this time not far from midnight.

Prince Paul felt cold and miserable. He had no hat on, and his clothes, while not as dripping as they had been, were still heavily wet, and he looked as though he had been taking a plunge in the river.

He had been in a much worse place.

The streets were in no better condition than they had been, of course, but it was clearing off, and the indications were all toward fair weather.

Paul had to walk home, as he was in no condition to enter any sort of public conveyance, and it took him a little longer than it otherwise would.

When he arrived it was about twelve o'clock. This he learned by looking into the window of a jeweler's store, which he had to pass. He had been in that underground den longer than he had supposed.

The house in which Paul and his sister lived was owned by a widow named Jane MacGregor. She was a Scotchwoman, about fifty years old, and had living with her a maiden sister who was older. Mrs. MacGregor had some means, and with the income from the upper part of the house, could live in comparative ease and luxury.

When Paul reached the house he found that the two women were up, as a light in the lower front indicated.

They had been away from home for a few days on a visit, and, as Paul rightly conjectured, had just returned.

Paul got his night-key out of his wet pocket after an effort, opened the hall door and went in and passed silently up-stairs.

There was no light in the hall, but knowing the way perfectly well, he did not need any, and was soon at the top. There he knocked lightly at the door of the rear room.

No response was given, and he knocked again, this time a little louder.

Still no answer.

"Elna must have fallen asleep," he thought. "Poor little sis, it is too bad that I have kept her up till such an hour. I know she has not gone to bed."

A little light could be seen under the door, and stooping, Paul looked in at the key-hole.

As he did so he gave a start. The key was not in the lock, but the light was burning dimly, and the fact that the door was locked and the key removed went to indicate that Elna had gone out.

This discovery made, Paul felt in the place where his sister always left the key when she went out, to see if it was there, but it was not.

What did it mean?

When she went away, Elna had no thought but that she was going to her brother, and so took the key with her. At other times in going out, when she knew Paul might return during her absence, she had always left the key in the place where he had now looked for it. On this occasion, under the circumstances, there was no need to do so; and in truth she had not thought of it.

Thinking that she might possibly be there, however, Paul knocked more loudly than ever, but there was still no answer.

This time the noise he made attracted the attention of Mrs. MacGregor, and she came out into the lower hall and called up:

"Who is that up there?"

"It is only I, Paul, Mrs. MacGregor," Paul answered promptly. "Do you know where my sister is?"

"No, my son, I do not," was the reply. "We have only just come home, and we thought both of you were fast asleep. Is she not there?"

Mrs. MacGregor always called Paul her son in addressing him.

"No, she is out, and has taken the key," Paul explained. "I have only just returned, having been detained. Will you kindly let me in with that key of yours that fits this door?"

Paul knew that she had such a key.

"Yes, my son, most certainly I will," came the answer, and the good, motherly old lady went back to get the key required.

She soon climbed up the stair, carrying a candle in her hand—she declared she would never part with her candle; and the door was soon open.

Paul hoped that she would go back immediately, before she discovered his condition, but she did not. Instead, she stepped into the room and turned the gas up full and strong.

Paul and she then ran their eyes over the room together.

There stood the table and everything, just as Elna had left it, and Paul knew that she had waited supper for him a long time. The cup she had used told him that she had finally taken a cup of tea, and he surmised that she had gone out to make some inquiry concerning him.

"You say you are just getting home?" Mrs. MacGregor asked, as she turned to Paul; and then for the first time seeing what a plight he was in, she added the exclamation:

"Goodness bless me! what a state you are in. What has happened ye?"

"Yes, I am just getting home," the Prince answered, using her own words. "I have had quite a mishap. I suppose Elna has gone out to look for me, and she will probably soon be back, now. I will change my clothes and will then set out to look for her if she has not returned by that time."

"Yes, you must do that," urged Mrs. MacGregor, solicitously.

The good old lady left the room, and Paul's first proceeding then was to make a complete change of raiment.

It took him fifteen or twenty minutes to do this, and during that time he was listening eagerly, hoping to hear Elna coming up the stair. But she came not, and when he had completed his change he determined to go out immediately to look for her.

Turning down the light about as he had found it, he took a piece of cake from the table to eat as he went along, for he was half famished; and closing the door, went down-stairs.

Mrs. MacGregor came out into the hall to meet him.

"The lassie has not come yet," she observed.

"No, and I will go and see if I can find her," said Paul. "If she comes while I am gone, tell her that I have been here, and that I am all right and will soon be back again."

"All right, my son, I will; and I will stay up myself to wait for you, for I am worried about the lassie. It is a late hour for her to be out."

Paul hastened from the house, munching his cake as he went along.

"Where can she have gone to look for me, or to make inquiries?" he questioned, as he turned down the street, having hardly settled in his mind which way he should go himself.

He thought of a telephone office down on the next block. Perhaps she had stopped in there to inquire for him at the post-office. The thought alarmed him. If so, she had learned that he had not reported there after setting out on his last delivery, and what step had she taken then?

There were grave reasons for apprehensions, but nothing so serious as the actual state of matters entered his head yet.

Arriving at the telephone office, he hardly knew how to make his inquiry, as he knew no one there, and did not suppose any one there knew Elna. He was aware, though, that a record was kept of the business done, what wires and numbers were used, and so forth, and so bad hope of learning something.

He first asked if any young lady had been in the office since about one o'clock. Several had been there. He described Elna, and asked if any of them answered to the description given. The clerks on duty thought not, but could not be quite sure. Next, he asked if any of them had communicated with the post-office. A glance at the books showed that no one had used the post-office number that evening.

Finding that he could learn nothing there, he hardly knew what move to make. Where should he go but to the post-office? As this thought came to him, the recollection of his promise to Detective Harpers came also. Here was a circumstance that had not been dreamed of when that promise was made. Was it necessary to observe it? He did not know what reason the detective had had in making the strange request. Perhaps it was something of vital importance. It would be only a few steps out of his course for him to call at the detective's boarding-house on his way down, and he would do it, late as the hour was.

With this determination made, Prince Paul pushed on at increased pace, greatly troubled in mind. From that moment he entered the lists as a detective, although he was not yet aware of it, nor of the important work that lay before him.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DETERMINED STEP TAKEN.

THE words of Harpers the detective, when he and Prince Paul were just making their escape from the den in which they had almost lost their lives, set that place in an uproar in no time.

"Who is it?" had been demanded, and the answer the detective fired back was:

"We are Danton Harpers and partner!"

"Oh, that is the lay, is it?" ejaculated the man, and he started after them.

Paul and Harpers had proved too quick for him, however, for when he got the door open and looked out they were away down the street.

In the mean time the shouting had attracted the attention of others in the saloon, and desperate men crowded out into the rear of the hall to learn what was going on to occasion it.

Not all of them knew what had been going on under the ground.

"What is it?" they demanded.

As they asked the question of one another, it was not answered at once; but some who were into the affair rushed on to the hall door.

"What's th' racket?" they demanded of the man there.

"That long-nose has got away, that's what," was the explanation they heard.

There was some high raving around there

then. But it did no good. Their prey had escaped, and that was the long and short of it.

While they stood there a number of men came tearing down the street swiftly but as silently as possible, and stopped at the saloon.

"Did they get away?" one gasped.

"Yes," was the answer, "they have skipped."

They could not seem to find "swear words" half strong enough to express their wrath.

"Here, you fellows," cried the proprietor of the place, coming out, "you want to make less noise out here. Either come in or go away."

This reminded them that they were on the street, and they all went in.

Just then other loud and angry voices were heard in the direction of the tunnel, and in a moment another band of rascals made their appearance from that direction.

In their excitement and baffled rage they scarcely knew bounds. It was noticeable, though, that they said but little that could let an outsider into their secret.

When the rear room had been partly cleared, however, and many had gone back to the main room of the saloon, then it was talked over more plainly. Then, too, they could talk it over more calmly.

"Well," snapped one, "he got away."

"They got away, you mean," corrected another. "Who was that other one? and where did he come from?"

"I don't know," answered the first speaker. "He was there, and that is all I know about it. He must have been down there, and it may be that he was sent there. It may be that the place had been discovered by the long-noses."

"I don't think that," put in another, "for they would have had it full of police if they had wanted to pull us in."

"That's so. Well, we got slipped up on, and we must make the best of it. I would never have believed that that man Harpers was such a terror."

"You don't know him, then."

"An' now what will be th' result of it?" questioned yet another. "Will he come back an' pull th' place?"

"It will be a healthy hive to get out of, and no mistake about that," declared the first speaker. "We had better be scarce here for some time. We can go to the other place, you know."

"It was a purty trick, anyhow, lettin' em git away," one of the band growled. "You kin bet they wouldn't 'a' got away from me, an' you hear me talkin'."

"How was it done, anyhow?" yet another inquired, putting the question to one of the late prisoners.

"It's all well enough fer you ter blow," growled one of the two who had had the detective in hand, "but you would 'a' got it just as we did. Who would 'a' thought o' sich a trick?"

"What trick?"

"Why, he can fight with his feet as well as with his hands," was the answer. "We had a sure thing on him, as we thought, but we got fooled."

Just then a new-comer entered. It was Sebastian Hardcroft.

"Hello! what is all this about?" he inquired.

"There is enough about it," was growled. "We had our hands onto Dant Harpers, but these two cowards let him get away from 'em."

"You take that back, Jim Penders," cried one of the men, springing forward with doubled fists, "or I will cram it down your throat. It wasn't our fault any more than yours, an' th' hull lot of ye. You couldn't nail him, even after we let ye know about it. He got away from th' lot of ye. How could we know he had help down there?"

"Take nothin' back," growled the one called Jim Penders; "you did let him git away from ye, an' ye can't deny it. Ye was afraid o' him."

"We ain't afraid o' you, though," cried the other of the unfortunate pair, springing to his partner's assistance, "an' you want ter shut right up. How could we know there was another man down there? It was somethin' that couldn't be helped."

"There, there, let's hear all about it," interrupted Hardcroft. "What was it, anyhow? How did you git hold of Harpers? Where was he? And who was the one who helped him out?"

"When these smart ones will let me tell ye," said one of the pair who were held responsible for the loss, "I will do so."

"Go ahead," Hardcroft urged; "they won't bother ye. What has happened can't be helped, an' there is no use fightin' over it."

It did not take long to give him the particulars of the case, and by the time the narrator had done, Hardcroft was pacing the floor in a greatly excited manner.

"Fire and smoke!" he cried, "can it be possible! No, I won't believe it. It was impossible. No man could get out of there. It was somebody else."

"What are you talking about?" was demanded.

"Nothing; I was thinkin'."

"That is a loud way ter think, that's all," growled the one who had asked the question.

"You was talkin' about somebody escapin'. Where was he ter escape from?"

It was the one who had told of the detective's capture and escape that put the question.

"Out of th' bath?" asked another, in a low voice.

Hardcroft was about to reply, when the door opened and another new-comer entered the den.

This time it was Dunlap Rogerton.

"Say nothin'," Hardcroft cautioned, in a hiss, without moving his lips; and he turned to young Rogerton and exclaimed.

"Hello, lieutenant! here you are, eh? I wanted to see you. Come right in. I was just jokin' these sellers on their luck. What d'ye think they have done?"

"Hard to tell," answered the young man, looking around with a smile. "What have they done? You do look a little down in the mouth, boys, and no mistake."

"Why," Hardcroft hastened to explain, "they captured Dant Harpers, but let him go again."

"I'm not surprised at the last part of it," declared Rogerton, carelessly, but his face darkened.

"You ain't?"

"Not a bit. It is not the first time that fellow has been captured."

"Well, mebby you're right; but it was only about three minutes or so ago, an' now they're fightin' ter see whose fault it was. Now if it—"

"You say only three minutes ago?" interrupted Rogerton, eagerly.

"Not more'n ten, at the very outside," some one assured.

"What are ye settin' here for, then?" demanded the young man hotly, dropping into their easy manner of speech. "Why ain't ye out an' after him?"

"What's th' use? Th' fox is in his hole afore this time?"

"Do you know where his hole is?"

"Yes, we know where his office is."

"I mean where he lives."

"No."

"Come with me, then, two of you, quick."

Young Rogerton—he was in disguise, by the way, and in one in which he was known by another name—indicated the two whom he wanted, and they followed him from the room and out of the saloon in haste.

At the door was a cab, and into that they all crowded hurriedly, Rogerton giving the driver his instructions as they did so.

The cab rattled quickly away.

Just a word right here about Dunlap Rogerton. He lived a double life. In the company in which we now find him he was known as Roger Dunlap, or better still as simply "the Lieutenant."

It was a character in which he was well known in this den, and few knew who he really was.

Leaving his father, half an hour before, he had gone to his house, put on the other self, and set out for the den immediately.

As soon as he and the two men he had taken with him had left the room in the rear of the saloon, one of the crowd there demanded of Hardcroft:

"What did ye mean by tellin' us ter say nothin', an' then you settin' yer mill ter runnin' an' lettin' th' hull thing out? What sense was there in that?"

Hardcroft winked his eye in a knowing way, and answered:

"It meant what it meant, an' it worked well. I'll tell ye. I didn't want th' Lieutenant ter know that there was two of th' men that escaped; see? An' now it is my treat all around if you will promise that you will keep that little bit o' knowledge from his ears. What say?"

"Why, that's simple enough," answered one; "hey, fellers!"

"That's what it is," they all agreed. "It is over now, an' it don't matter if there was a dozen of 'em."

"Bring on yer treat," added another, "an' our heads is shut. It ain't nothin' ter brag about, anyhow."

Hardcroft ordered what they wanted, and so the agreement was made. The wily rascal had a faint suspicion that the postman had got away, though he did not see how it could be possible, and he did not want the same suspicion to come to Rogerton.

In the mean time the cab with its three occupants had rolled on, and the "Lieutenant" gave clear and explicit directions to his two companions concerning work he had for them to do.

What that work was it is easy to infer from the conversation that preceded their setting out.

It succeeded only too well.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DEED OF BLOOD.

The "Lieutenant" had lately made a discovery, and one that, for important reasons, he had meant to profit by at the first opportunity.

That opportunity had now come.

He had learned the place where the man he most feared in all New York—a man named Danton Harpers, lived.

That he had reason to fear this man need not be told, since we have seen the determined step taken to dispose of him.

It had been through him that Harpers had been drawn into the den where he almost met his death, and through his work that his disguise had been penetrated; although that part had seemed to the detective to be simply a chance misfortune, such as will overtake the best of men once in a while.

It had been a long-laid and deliberately planned trap, and the detective had walked into it.

Coming into the den as he had, the "Lieutenant" had no knowledge that the trap had been sprung, and that the prey had escaped, but he was soon made aware of it in the manner shown.

Seeing his well-laid plot frustrated, he grew desperate, and on the spur of the moment resolved upon a more desperate measure.

The cab rolled on at a good pace, till at length it entered a street where it slowed down to a walk, under directions from inside.

While it proceeded at that gait, the young rascal inside pointed out a certain house, saying as he did so:

"There is the house, and now the rest of it depends on you. You know how we stand. It is his life or ours. He has learned a secret this night that he must not reveal. Do not be afraid to do your best to insure your safety."

"Depend on us for that, Lieutenant," was the grim response.

"I think you are here ahead of him, for we have come at good speed, and you may get him on the hip before he can get into his hole. If not, it must be a shot at sight to-morrow, and a run for safety. In the latter event, fire from a cab, and then dust out immediately."

"We understand."

Detective Harpers was in more imminent danger than he dreamed of. He had in these men enemies who would be satisfied with nothing but his life.

At the next corner the two men got out, and the cab rattled away.

It was a corner suited to their dark purpose. A building was in course of construction, and the sidewalk had been removed and a bridge of planks served in its place. On one side of this walk stood a huge telegraph pole, throwing a long, deep shadow from end to end of the bridge, almost. On the other side was a hand-railing, to prevent pedestrians from falling over into the excavation.

Here the rascals stopped, and seeing that no one was near, one of them tied a piece of slim but strong cord around the telegraph pole, about a foot higher than the level of the planking; and that done, one stood erect in the shadow of and close to the pole, while the other clambered over the edge of the walk and took his station down in the hole below, having hold of the end of the string.

In this way they waited.

Several persons passed, and after a time a policeman came along.

The man behind the pole tried to shrink into himself, to keep from being seen, but as the officer was walking much slower than any of the others who had passed, and had his eyes well about him the fellow was discovered.

"Who are you, and what are you doing there?" was the stern demand.

"Why, I am th' watchman here," was the answer, given in as matter-of-fact way as the rascal could command.

The fellow was trembling in his boots.

It would have gone hard with him, but it happened that the officer was new on the force, and had many things yet to learn.

"Oh, that's the case, is it?" he observed, and went slowly on.

No sooner had he got out of earshot than the rascals held a conference.

"It won't do ter try it here," spoke the one who had been seen; "that blue-coat seen my face."

"Well, what then?" demanded the other.

"We will walk on down an' take chance o' meetin' our man."

"If he gets sight of us, we can't never do nothin' with him."

Just then a cab rattled along the street, going in the opposite direction from that which the "Lieutenant" had taken, and as it passed the corner a sharp whistle was given by some one within.

It was an agreed-upon signal.

"Too late," exclaimed the man under the bridgeway, "our game is comin'. Is anybody near?"

"No," answered the other, after a hasty glance around, "no one is nearer than that blue-coat, and he is about out o' sight an' hearin'."

"Good! We'll chance it. When th' disease is bad, desperate remedies has ter be applied, you know."

"Well, if you are willin', I am. Let him come."

"Don't make no mistake," the other cautioned.

"Trust me fer that," was the assurance. "I know th' feller well, by sight, when he ain't in

tog, an' if I can't be sure o' him I won't send him down to you."

"Right. Mum is th' word now."

They became perfectly quiet, and ere long a man approached at quick pace.

As he passed under the light on the opposite corner, the villain behind the pole looked out, and his recognition of the person was sure and instant.

It was none other than the detective.

The man behind the pole gave two distinct scrapes with his foot, and the deadly string was lifted about six inches above the walk.

On the detective came, his thoughts busy, and with no thought of immediate danger in his mind. He sprung lightly up the two steps at the end of the bridgeway, and continued on at the same rapid walk.

Suddenly he tripped over the string, and went forward with a headlong dive, trying in vain to save himself from falling. After him sprung the man who had been in waiting behind the pole, and gave him a shove that sent him under the hand-rail and down into the excavation below.

It was all done in less time than it takes to tell of it.

The unfortunate detective knew what was up, at the very first, but he could not help himself in the least. He who had trapped many men, was now trapped himself. Down he went, to the hard ground below—rather rocks than ground, and the instant he struck he was rendered insensible.

No sooner was he down than the man in hiding there pounced upon him, and a long, keen blade was driven to its very hilt in his back.

It was a horrible crime—a deliberate, cold-blooded murder!

The murderer waited for nothing. No sooner had their cruel work been done than they were out and away from that locality.

Walking at as fast a pace as they dared, they stopped for nothing until they had put many blocks between themselves and the scene of their crime.

When they finally stopped, it was at a corner where a cab was standing.

As they came up a man put his head out of the cab and interrogated:

"Well?"

"The bottle fell over," was the significant answer, "and the wine ran out."

"All spilt?"

"Every drop, by this time."

"Jump in here, then, and give your directions where you want to go," and as he spoke the "Lieutenant" got out and walked away, turning the cab over to them.

They were prompt to avail themselves of it, and were soon in another part of the city.

The "Lieutenant" lost no time in getting to his place of residence.

It was about an hour later, and the roundsman on duty in that ward of the city was going his round, when a groan was heard that drew his attention.

He was just on the temporary bridgeway that spanned the excavation in front of and under the new building, and the groan seemed to come from below. He stopped and listened, to assure himself that he had not been mistaken.

Presently it was repeated. There was no mistaking the sound.

Running off the bridge, he sounded the alarm on the pavement with his club as loudly as he could, and it was immediately responded to from no great distance away. A sharp signal from his whistle, then, brought a policeman running to his assistance.

Again he "sprung his rattle," and another answer was heard, further off.

"What is it?" asked the policeman who came up.

"Some person is in trouble under this plank sidewalk," the roundsman briefly explained. "We must learn what is the matter."

As he was speaking he took from a pocket a torch that was no larger than a candle, unscrewed the cap that covered its top, and lighted it.

"Come on," he ordered, "and we'll investigate."

Little did that roundsman suspect what an awful surprise awaited him.

They climbed over at the end of the plank walk, got down into the hole, and moved forward, the roundsman holding the light high up so that its rays would fall as far around as possible.

The other was the one to discover the victim of the crime.

"Here! here he is!" he exclaimed, and thus drew the roundsman's attention.

Stepping forward to where the man lay, the officers turned him over in order to see his face, and at sight of it, the roundsman cried:

"Heavens! it is Harpers, the detective!"

By this time the other policeman was on hand, and he was ordered to send for an ambulance.

Further detail need not be given.

The ambulance soon arrived; the detective was placed tenderly in it, and in a little time was in a hospital, where he was examined.

Up to this time he had been unconscious, but

he came to for a little while, and tried to talk, but the surgeon in charge forbade it.

He had voiced one request, however, during the little time that he was conscious, and that was that his case should be kept out of the papers.

What reason he had for this was not known, but Harpers was known, and his request was strictly ordered to be observed. There was some reason for it. What that was, the detective himself would disclose—if he lived. If he died—Well, that would put another aspect upon the affair.

The chief was sent for, and he, personally, went through the pockets of the detective's clothes.

He made a discovery, but what it was he found, and he carried it away with him.

Would Harpers die? That was the important question. The surgeon would not venture to say that there was much hope that he would live. It was a sad blow to those who knew of it, and it was ordered that the news should go no further.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SERIOUS CHARGE MADE.

PRINCE PAUL, the Postman Detective, soon found himself in the neighborhood of Danton Harpers's place of residence.

Making sure of the right number, he ran up the steps and rung the bell in a quick, sharp manner.

A dim light was burning in the hall.

At first there was no response, and he rang again.

Presently a woman, evidently the landlady, in a hastily-donned wrapper, came to the door.

She took the precaution to turn the light up brightly before she opened the door to learn who was there, though no doubt she thought it some late boarder who had left his night-key behind.

"Does Mr. Danton Harpers live here?" asked Paul, the moment the door was opened.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

"Will you please ascertain whether he is in? I must see him upon very urgent business."

"Yes; wait a moment," and closing the door again the woman went up-stairs, as Paul could hear.

When she came back it was with the information that Mr. Harpers had not yet come in.

"Some nights he does not come in at all," she added.

"It is strange," said Paul, "for I saw him not an hour ago, and he was coming right home here. May I step within and write a message for him? and will you put it in his room in some place where he will be sure to see it when he comes?"

"Yes, sir, certainly."

She threw open the door and Paul stepped inside, and taking a card from his pocket he hastily wrote:

"HARPERS:—Must act at once. Urgent reasons for this. Cannot wait an hour. Will probably see you at your office to-morrow. In haste."

"PAUL."

On the other side of the card were his name and address.

Handing the card to the woman, urging the necessity of her putting it where Harpers could not fail to find it, he left the house and hastened away.

That card was destined to bring an early surprise to Prince Paul.

"Well," I did not find him, the Postman Detective mused, "and I can do no more. I—Hold on, though; it is but very little out of my way to go to his office. I will go there. It is possible that he may be there."

Proceeding with haste, Paul soon found himself at the building where the detective had his office, but it was closed and locked.

A loud knock brought the janitor.

Paul made known his want, and in a short time was told that the detective was not in his room.

He could do no more, and went immediately to the post-office.

The head of the department he was in had long since gone home, and only the night force was around.

Paul knew some of them, and being admitted, went to the chief in charge and told his story, making thorough inquiries at the same time whether any one had been there looking for him.

The night chief of the department listened to the story in silence, and when Paul had done, said:

"That is a strange tale, if true—"

"What do you mean?" demanded Paul, fiercely.

"I mean that is a strange story, the tale you tell. I was informed when I came on duty that you had not returned, and a man has been sent to look for you."

"If you mean to insinuate that I am here with a lie in my mouth," the postman grated, "I will bring you sufficient proof that what I have told you is strictly true."

"And whom will you bring to prove it?"

"Did you ever hear of Danton Harpers, the detective?"

"Everybody has heard of him."

"Well, he is the man that can prove it, and he will do so. I never thought that you could entertain so mean a suspicion of me, Gerald Kempster."

"It is a suspicion that others may have," observed the chief, coolly; "and as you have proof, it will be well for you to bring it forward at an early hour."

"I can do it, and I will."

"Very well. I will report the case, and you had better come here early in the morning and see the superintendent of the department in person."

"I fully intend doing so."

Just then a man entered in haste. He had a postman's letter-bag over his shoulder, and at a glance Paul recognized it as his.

He also recognized the man who brought it.

The fellow's name was Owen Chanley, and he was a night clerk in the office, and one of Kempster's handy men.

Prince Paul was not on good terms with either of them. Or, rather, they were not on good terms with him. And, as is usually the case, there was a woman in the question. But, more of this anon.

"What have you there, Chanley?" Kempster demanded.

"It is Paul Boothman's pouch," was the answer.

As he said that, Chanley took it from his shoulder and deposited it on the floor.

"Where did you find it?" Kempster asked.

Chanley told him, and it was, if true, found in a place quite a distance from where Paul had met with his adventure. And there was no reason to doubt the truth of the statement, for Chanley had heard nothing of Paul's story, and had no object, so far as could be seen, in making a false statement about it.

"That does not agree with your story, Paul," observed Kempster. "How came the bag so far away from where you met with your wondrous adventure?"

"I do not pretend to know," Paul answered.

"It looks likely that it was taken there, in order to draw suspicion away from the house."

"That is not impossible, at any rate. Had you any valuable letters?"

"I do not know. I had no registered ones."

"You had no registered letters, you say?"

"Not one."

"There is a mistake somewhere. Chanley, hand me the book."

The clerk did so, and turning over its leaves the chief soon came to the entry he wanted.

"Your statement does not agree with this record," he observed. "Here is a letter set down, numbered, dated, and signed for by you."

Prince Paul knew not what to make of this. He had signed for no registered matter that day.

"Let me see that signature," he demanded.

He was allowed to take the book into his hands.

"That signature is not mine," he immediately denied. "I have had no registered letter today. Somebody has forged my name."

"Is his delivery-book in the pouch?" Kempster inquired, turning to Chanley again.

"Yes," as the clerk felt and brought it out, "here it is."

He handed it over.

Kempster opened it, and immediately exclaimed:

"Ha! worse and worse! Here is a leaf gone from your book, Boothman, and it happens to be the very one on which this letter ought to have been entered."

Paul grew hot and cold by turns. What did this mean? He could not comprehend it. Added to his other troubles, here was something that he never dreamed of.

"This is a base plot against me," he cried. "I tell you that signature there is a forgery. I do not understand it, but what I tell you is the truth."

"I hope it is, at any rate, for—"

"Curse you!" Paul could not help exclaiming, "you are dead against me. You know in your heart, Gerald Kempster, that that is not my own hand, and yet you will try to make everything as black as you can."

The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know anything about it," he observed. "I do not accuse nor defend you. What have you to say about the missing leaf from your book, though?"

"I cannot explain how it came torn out," Paul truthfully answered.

As he put the last question, the chief dumped the contents of the pouch out upon a table. There were many letters, papers, etc., and although many of them were much soiled, none of them had been opened.

"It is strange all these letters are not open," he remarked. "A common robber would have opened every one of them, it seems to me. As it is, only one seems to be missing, and that the registered one."

"I tell you there was no registered one," Paul fiercely hissed. "And if I had been my own robber, as you seem bound to insist, do you

suppose that I would have left any proof for you to get hold of? I am not a fool; neither am I thief."

"We know that you are not the former, and I sincerely hope that you are not the latter," said Kempster, deliberately.

Paul had his fists clinched, and could hardly help striking the man to the floor. He controlled himself, though, with an effort, and asked:

"Will you allow me to look over these letters?" indicating the ones that had been emptied from his pouch.

"What is your object in that?" the chief demanded.

"I can remember two letters that I had, and I want to see if they are missing. I know that one, and perhaps more, was taken by the men who attacked me."

"Hal! you did not mention that when you first told your story. Your memory is coming to your aid, I see. No doubt one was the registered letter."

It was all Paul could do to keep cool. In fact, he was not cool, for he was hot with rage and indignation, but he was forcing a calmness.

"I have told you that I had no registered letter," he once more declared. "I warn you not to imply again that I am a liar, sir. You have a right to accept my word until you can prove it false."

Paul's manner was now such that the chief dared not disobey the order.

"What letters do you refer to?" he asked, with a wave of the hand as though the other point raised were nothing.

"I refer to a letter that was for the house where I was trapped, and one that was for my uncle, Horatio Boothman, which was the next one I had to deliver."

"Well, you may look for them."

Paul advanced to the table and began sorting over the letters, and at the same time Kempster gave a sign to Chanley and the latter went silently out.

In a little while Paul had done, and turned from his task, saying:

"Those two letters are not here. I will go, and you may inform the superintendent that I will come in early in the morning and see him."

At that moment Chanley returned, bringing a policeman with him.

"I do not think you will go just yet," asserted Kempster. "I think circumstances will warrant your detention. Officer, arrest this man!"

CHAPTER XX.

ARRESTED FOR MURDER.

PRINCE PAUL was thunderstruck.

He was aware that things were taking a serious turn, and that a suspicion was being hatched against him, but he had no idea that it would come to such a sudden and aggressive termination.

Under any other circumstances he would have submitted to arrest, and would have made no fight against it; but his mind troubled as it was for the safety of his sister, it was not to be thought of.

Knowing himself to be innocent, his mind was in a whirl trying to fathom the depth of the plot against him. It was something that he could not understand. Whose work was it? What was the object?

There was no time now for study, however. He must act, and that at once.

For one moment he stood as though spell-bound, but the next he was all action. As the officer stepped toward him he roused up, and with a single standing jump was over the table and nearest the door.

"No you don't!" he cried, and he was off like a shot.

"Hold on, there! Stop, or I'll shoot!" cried the officer, as he sprung after him, but the only reply or satisfaction he got was a defiant shout for him to shoot if he wanted to.

Knowing the ins and outs of the place well as he did, Paul had no trouble in eluding the policeman, and in a few moments he was far away from the vicinity, and out of present danger.

What to do now he did not know. His greatest concern was still for Elna. He could not imagine what had become of her. What should be his next move? Could it be that she had gone around to Natalie Bakers's home? Why had he not thought of that before? He would set out for there at once.

Natalie Bakers was a daughter of one of the oldest carriers on the force. She was a sweet and pretty girl, and she and Elna Boothman were firm friends. More, she was as good as betrothed to Prince Paul.

His place of destination fixed upon, Paul plunged ahead at his fastest walk, and as he went along his thoughts were busy. He went over the events of the afternoon and evening.

In the afternoon everything had passed off as usual. Nothing had come up to cause him to suspect danger from any source, and there was nothing that he could look back upon as suggestive of anything out of the ordinary. He had been a little late, it was true, owing to the

weather and the lateness of the mails, but that was all.

He had made up his evening delivery as usual, and was now doubly sure that there had been no registered letter in it. He set out, and everything went well until he came to the house where he was so nearly murdered. If there had been a registered letter—but, he knew there had not;—was that the one the man had taken? Knowing that he had had no registered letters, however, was the letter taken the one that had been addressed to his uncle! But, who could have any object in stealing a letter from him?

And, as he reasoned further, who could possibly have known what letters he had or had not? That puzzled him. No, he was forced to adopt Detective Harpers's theory that the attack had been upon him personally, with the object of putting him out of the way. But, another blocking question, who could possibly want him out of the way in that manner? He could think of no one.

That part of the puzzle had to rest as it was, and here was a new one: who could it be that had forged his name to the registry book? Why had it been done? It was plain that there had been such a letter in the office, or no one would have dared to enter it in the book; but what had become of it? Had some one stolen it, and thus tried to put the loss upon his shoulders? It looked that way. And, what about the leaf torn out of his delivery book?

Baffling questions, all of them.

Had there been any other persons than Gerald Kempster and Owen Chanley as his first accusers, he would have been all at sea, but it being they—Was the suspicion groundless, or was there some foundation under it? He knew that Owen Chanley loved Natalie Bakers, and that there was a strong friendship between him and Gerald Kempster? Could it be that they had concocted a plot to ruin him, in the hope that by so doing the field would be open to them? That might account for the register-letter mystery, but had they carried their work so far? Yes, for one part could not stand without the other. But, could it be possible that they were at the bottom of his attempted murder? He dared not think so.

It can be seen that he had plenty of food for reflection, as he hurried along the street, and so busy was his mind that he was at his destination before he realized it.

It was by this time along in the small hours of the morning. He hated to ring the bell, but considering the urgency of the case, did not hesitate to do so.

In a short time the head of the old carrier was thrust out at a window, and he demanded:

"Who's there?"

"It is I, Paul Boothman," Paul answered.

"Has my sister been here to-night?"

"No, she has not been here, Paul," was the answer. "Is she missing?"

"Yes, and I do not know where she can be. Come down and let me in, old friend, for I am in trouble, and I have a startling story to tell you!"

"I will be down in just one minute, Paul," was the answer, and the window was hastily shut.

In a little time Paul was admitted, and he followed the older carrier up to the neat sitting-room, where they both sat down, and Paul told what had taken place.

"Now," he asked, as he concluded, "what do you advise?"

"You ask me a hard question," Baker answered, after a thoughtful pause. "I do not know what to tell you. The first thing is to find Elna. Let nothing interfere with that duty. Do not submit to arrest until she is safe. My advice, is see that detective just as soon as you can."

"Then you would submit to arrest, when innocent?"

"I think I would, after the girl has been recovered. It will speak well for you if you give yourself up. You have a good excuse for having resisted arrest."

"Well, I will take your advice in regard to seeing the detective, at any rate. And, if Elna is not at home when I return, I think I will report her loss to the police. It may be the means of finding her all the sooner."

"Yes, I would do that."

"If she does not return by morning, I will let you know, and no doubt Natalie can assist me in the search, as she will know of all the places where Elna has been in the habit of visiting."

"By the way," said Baker, when they had talked on for some time, "I am to be promoted to office duty to-morrow, and I can assure you that I shall keep my eyes open for those two fellows in every way that I can."

"I congratulate you. Yes, if you learn anything of interest to me, do not fail to let me know of it."

When Paul left there he went straight home.

Letting himself in, he found that a light was still burning in Mrs. MacGregor's room, and he knocked at the door. It was opened immediately.

"Has Elna returned?" was his inquiry.

"No, the lassie has not come yet," was the reply—the answer he had dreaded to hear.

He sunk down upon the steps of the stairs. He was about worn out physically, and his head was in a whirl.

"This is terrible," he muttered. "What is to be done? Where can she be? I shall go mad if I do not find her."

"Did you go to her friend Natalie's?" asked Mrs. MacGregor, hoping to give him a ray of hope.

"I have been everywhere," Paul sadly answered. "That is, everywhere but to Police Headquarters. I shall go there at once and have a general alarm sent out, and in that manner she may soon be found. I fear the worst, Mrs. MacGregor. I know that she would not be out until this hour unless forcibly detained, or some accident having happened her."

"I fear the same, my son," the good woman voiced; "but let us hope for the best."

"Well, Mrs. MacGregor, do not remain up. I will do all that can be done. You need your rest."

"Indeed, but I will not go to bed and the lassie out; I could not do it. I must remain up till you come in again. You may hear of her this time."

Paul went out, and started for the nearest police station. He had reasoned that it was not necessary for him to go to Headquarters. The alarm could be sent out from any other station as well.

He had not mentioned his other troubles to Mrs. MacGregor.

In a little time he reached the station and made inquiry for Elna, giving her description. The telephone was used liberally, but no station communicated with had seen anything of her. No report had come in of any accident to any young lady.

It seemed a hopeless search.

Giving as good a description of her as he could, he caused a general alarm to be sent out, and left his address so that he could be notified if she were found.

It was with a heavy heart that he returned home.

Mrs. MacGregor met him in the hall, and read the result of his inquiries in his face.

"Do not be in despair," she encouraged. "She will be found alive and well, and then everything will be jolly."

The good woman did not know half the truth.

Paul went up to his own room, and threw himself into a chair. He was tired out completely, and his ideas almost confused. Can we wonder? He tried to think over all that had taken place, but could not keep his thoughts in one line. The room was warm, and sleep soon came upon him. He tried to rouse up and fight it off, and for a time he paced the floor.

He was in torment. When he sat down again, which he soon did, his head dropped forward upon his breast, and he slept.

Nor did he awake until the morning sun came pouring in upon him through the windows, which he had opened before falling asleep, hoping that the cool air would keep him awake; nor even then, until Mrs. MacGregor rapped loudly at his door.

He jumped up with a start. His first thought was that he was late for duty. The next instant the awful truth flooded back upon him.

Mrs. MacGregor knocked again.

Now fully aroused, Paul threw open the door, and there was his landlady with a strange man standing behind her.

"Are you Paul Boothman?" the stranger asked, before the landlady could speak.

"I am," Paul answered.

"Allow me to step in and speak with you in private, then," the man said, and pushing Mrs. MacGregor gently aside he entered the room and closed and locked the door behind him.

The door locked, he turned and faced Paul, and in one hand was a revolver and in the other a pair of handcuffs.

"Paul Boothman," he said, in a stern but very low tone, "you are my prisoner. I arrest you for the murder of Detective Danton Harpers!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OFF-HAND BLUFF.

PRINCE PAUL reeled back as though he had been shot.

It was not so much the arrest, nor the terrible charge, as it was the information that Danton Harpers had been murdered.

"Danton Harpers murdered!"

That was the exclamation he uttered, and he clutched at a chair for support.

"Is it news to you, then?" asked the stranger.

"It is terrible news," Paul gasped. "Can it be possible? I made his acquaintance last night for the first time, and parted with him a little before midnight. He was then going home."

"Where did you part with him? and was he alone?" were the next questions.

Paul answered them.

The stranger put away his revolver and the handcuffs and sat down, motioning Paul to a seat, too.

"Let me introduce myself," he said, then. "I am Inspector —." He whispered the name.

Paul was surprised.

"And do you really arrest me?" he asked. "What is the circumstance that has led you to suspect me of the murder of Mr. Harpers?"

"No, I do not arrest you," was the answer. "I came to you in that manner to satisfy myself whether you knew anything about it or not, and whether you could possibly have had a hand in it."

"Are you satisfied?"

"I am. You knew nothing about the matter until this moment."

"That is the truth," Paul affirmed. "But, what has brought you to me?"

"I want to get a clew to the crime."

"And you think I can give you one?"

"I think you can. Pay attention. You have owned that you were with Harpers a little before midnight. A little after that he was murdered. You say he was going home when you left him. He was murdered while on his way there, and not far from his house. He was found an hour or so later, down in the unfinished basement of a new building at the corner. He was taken to a hospital—"

"Then he was not dead?" Paul interrupted suddenly.

"No, and he is living yet; but it is doubtful whether he will recover. It is a dangerous wound he has."

"Well, go on, sir."

"I was sent for, and I went through his pockets. He had a note-book, and the last entry in it was your name and address. In a pocket of his trowsers were a gold watch and chain. These were not his own, and they were badly stained with damp mud. On the inside of the case of the watch are the initials D. R. Do you know of any one whom these letters might stand for?"

Paul thought for a moment.

"I do not," he answered.

The inspector took the watch and chain from his pocket and handed them to the postman.

"Have you ever seen these before?" he inquired.

"Not that I am aware of," Paul replied, after looking at the articles carefully.

"Then one hope is knocked to the ground. I was in hopes that you would recognize them."

The inspector took the watch and chain and returned them to his pocket.

"When I left the hospital," he went on with his recital, "I went to the place where Harpers boarded. I wanted to learn whether he had been there, and had been called out, or whether he had not been in. There another surprise awaited me. I found that you had called about one o'clock, had inquired for Harpers, and not finding him, you had left this card."

Here the inspector took from his pocket the card that Harpers should have received had he not been waylaid.

"This card," the inspector went on, "decided me to come to you. That Harpers had your name in his note-book did not signify much, but this did. Now your question as to how I connected you with the mystery has been answered, and I am ready to hear your story. I am sure you have one, for this card shows that you and Harpers had some business matter on hand."

"I will tell you everything, sir," said Paul, promptly, "for there is more in this matter than I can understand."

"Go right ahead. Above all things, do not keep any points back."

Paul told his story, giving every detail.

The inspector listened in silence, not once interrupting.

When Paul had done, then he said:

"Young man, this is a double mystery. There is more in it than I can see through at a glance. One thing I want to say right here, however, is this: You must not allow yourself to be arrested on that charge of theft. That will never do at this time. You have a work to do."

Just then heavy steps were heard in the hall.

"I thought so," observed the inspector, carelessly. "Detectives are after you. Here, put on this beard and cap— No, I'll do it for you. There: now you are my man Howard. Do you understand?"

"Yes," answered Paul.

"The men are on the stairs. The windows are open. Paul went out that way, you understand. He escaped us."

It was no sooner said than there was a rap at the door.

"Come in," the inspector invited.

The door opened and two men walked in, one of them with a drawn revolver in hand.

"Hello!" exclaimed the inspector, "what's wanted?"

"Hello! I am surprised to find you here, inspector," cried the first of the pair; "what brings you here?"

"And I am none the less surprised to see you here," the inspector returned. "What is up with you? We are in quest of a missing girl, who lives here, and who suddenly disappeared last night."

"What girl?"

"Miss Elma Boothman."

"Indeed! Well, I am after her brother, Paul Boothman."

"You won't find him, then. He is not here."

"Where is he?"

Prince Paul pointed to the open window.

"Skipped?"

"Skipped."

"And who are you?"

"Howard, one of my men," explained the inspector.

Paul had changed his voice, and he could see that the inspector was pleased with his effort.

"Well, if Paul Boothman has lit out," observed the post-office inspector, "it is pretty conclusive evidence of his guilt."

"What is the charge?" the inspector asked.

"Theft. He came in at a late hour last night, with the story that he had been robbed. He went out with a valuable registered letter, which he denied having, but at the same time a leaf was missing from his book, and his signature was on the office register. It was too transparent altogether."

"He may be innocent, for all that."

"But he has skipped. Honest men do not fear arrest."

"That amounts to nothing, under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"I don't set myself up to advise you," said the inspector, deferentially, "but I think I can give you a pointer. This Paul Boothman has sent an alarm to the police that his sister has disappeared, and that being the case, and he almost wild about her, does it stand to reason that he would want to be incarcerated at this time?"

"That may be a blind."

"It is hardly likely. Does it stand to reason that a guilty man, wanting to keep out of sight, would invite the whole Police Department to keep watch of his movements?"

"There is no end of cunning tricks in these days," was the evasive answer.

"I agree with you there."

"What do you think about it?" and the post-office man turned suddenly to Paul with the question.

"I agree with the inspector here," Paul answered. "Moreover, that postman of yours would be a fool to sign for a package and then try to steal it; and a greater fool he, allowing that he was his own robber, to set up a plea of not having had such a package. If robbed, why not robbed of that letter?"

That hit the nail right on the head, and the inspector looked satisfied.

Not so the post-office man. He had his theory, and this little clog in the cogs of it did not suit him.

"Well, we shall see," he remarked. "We shall soon have our man, and then no doubt the truth will come out. Can you give me a pointer as to where he may be?"

"It is safe to say that he is in search of his sister," was the response.

"Perhaps. I don't bet heavy on that story. Well, if you see him I will consider it a favor if you will put us on his track. If innocent, it will do him no harm, and if guilty you will only have done your duty."

"It is hardly likely that we shall see him," said Paul. "Knowing that he is wanted, he will keep out of the way of arrest."

"Which looks bad," declared the post-office man. "He has set you to look for his sister, and if innocent he should now give himself up."

"That is where our theories clash," returned the inspector. "But," he added, "we must be going. If you want to look around here, shut the doors when you are done and leave the key with the landlady on the lower floor. Come on, Howard."

The post-office man was eying Prince Paul keenly, and but for the word of the inspector he would no doubt have demanded to know more about him. As it was, he stood in awe of making a blunder, and said nothing.

"All right," he responded to the inspector's last words, and while the inspector and Paul went out, he and his men looked around the room.

Mrs. MacGregor was in the hall, and as he passed her Paul whispered:

"I am Paul. If the men up-stairs ask you anything, don't know anything. Do not be alarmed; they are officers, and will lock the rooms and give you the key. Take care of things till I return."

The good old lady looked at Paul in open-mouthed amazement, and only ejaculated "Law sakes!" and Paul did not allow her time to say more. He knew that she was to be trusted, and went right on out with the inspector.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRUMP HAND IN THE GAME.

WHEN Prince Paul and the inspector left the house, the latter said:

"Come, we will go to the hospital and see how Harpers is, and then to my office, and lay out a line of action. I may want to use you at the same time that we are helping you. That den must be pulled."

"I am only too willing, sir," Paul answered. "You are aware, though, that Harpers wanted me to let him know before I reported my case. Perhaps you understand his object in that."

"Yes, I do. It will be all right."

They said little more, as they then entered a car and set out for the hospital.

Arriving there, the inspector inquired after the detective, and was gratified to learn that he had just become conscious.

"Good!" he exclaimed: "I must see him."

"But, it is forbid," was the answer.

"Can't help that," said the inspector, decidedly. "I must and will see him. I must ask him one question."

The manner of the inspector admitted of no further denial on the part of the under-surgeon, who immediately turned the matter over to his superior and so rid himself of it.

"Your interview must be very brief," said the chief of the ward. "You may see him for a moment."

Entering the room where the detective lay, the inspector went up to him and asked:

"Harpers, do you know me?"

The detective looked and answered:

"Yes, inspector."

"Good! What about that watch and chain?"

"It came out of the pocket of the man who stabbed me. I had just consciousness enough to put it into my own."

"Good! Can you give me any further cl-wf?"

"No. But—but—"

"What do you want to say?"

"Name in my note-book—"

"Yes, yes, I know; Paul Boothman. What of him?"

"See him, and hear his story. He can—"

"I have done so; I know all about it, Dant."

"Well, put the case right into his hands. I have measured him. I—I—"

Weakness prevented the detective from saying more, and in a little time he was again unconscious.

"I feared it," observed the surgeon. "He must not be seen again under any circumstance. I will not allow it."

"It will not be necessary," returned the inspector. "Poor fellow! I hope he will pull through."

"It will be a close call."

The inspector rejoined Paul, and together they set out for the inspector's office.

The case was not mentioned on the way there, nor was the subject brought up until they were seated in the office and the doors were closed.

Then the inspector was the first to speak about it.

"Young man," he said, "I am going to put important work into your hands. I am satisfied that you are capable of undertaking it."

"What is it?" Paul asked.

"I want you to ferret out the man, or men, who attempted to murder Harpers. I will back you with the whole Department. At the same time you can have your eye open in your own case. But, I am inclined to think there is some connection between the two. What it is I do not know. Why I think so, is because it stands to reason that the men who attacked you and the ones who first tried to put Harpers out of the way belong to the same clique. That both of you were to be disposed of in the same manner and in the same place, proves that."

"I agree with you, sir."

"Well, listen: I will give you a perfect disguise, and you must take this watch and chain and wear them. This peculiar charm will attract the attention of the owner at sight. He may not dare to question you about it, but you will not fail to notice his recognition of it. When that takes place you will have your man."

"I see; but why do you want to trust me with such important work? Why not put one of your best men on the case?"

"I give it to you at the request of Harpers."

Paul was surprised.

"I will undertake it," he decided, "and if it is in me I will run the infernal rascals to earth. As for my own case, I have already sworn that I will bring to account the villains who attacked me and tried to murder me, and you are placing me in just the right position to do it. Rest assured that I shall do my best."

"I believe it. But, you—"

They were interrupted by a rap at the door, and the inspector arose to learn who it was.

After a few words with the person at the door, he closed it, and turning to Paul said:

"It is a Government man, and he wants to see me about your case. Step into that closet there and remain perfectly quiet till he goes."

Paul obeyed, and in a moment a man entered the room.

He and the inspector greeted each other, and the caller sat down and went over the story Paul had told the chief of the delivery department on the previous night, giving it in substantially the same form.

"What we want to do," he concluded, "is to 'pull' that den and see what we can find."

"You have not told me all," observed the inspector, calmly; and he went ahead and gave out all about the suspicion that had been started against the young postman.

"Where did you get hold of that?" was demanded.

The inspector explained.

"Well, it is true," the man from the post-

office acknowledged: "we are looking for the young man, and shall arrest him on the charge."

"Is there not something a little incongruous in your methods, then?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, on the one hand you are accepting the postman's story as true, and on the other you are giving it the lie. But, no matter, I agree with you on one side—on the side that it is true, and we will have the place looked after immediately."

"Very well. When will it be done? I want to be on hand with one or two of my men."

"We will go down there at ten o'clock and examine the houses."

"I will meet you."

More was said, but the interview soon ended, and when the caller had gone Paul came out from the closet.

"It looks better for you," the inspector remarked.

"How so?" asked Paul.

"That man has suspicions in some other direction."

"You think so?"

"I know it. He believes in the story you told."

"Whether he does or not," Paul added, "he will have to believe it when he sees the place just as I have described it."

"To be sure. Well, here we must get ready for action immediately. Come with me and adopt a new disguise."

The chief led Paul to a room where he assisted him to make a complete change in his appearance, and when he came out no one would have known him. As chance would have it, he was, in dress, almost a counterpart of Dunlap Rogerton. He was dressed in all the dudish elegance. His coat was a cutaway, and across his vest hung the chain that had been found in the pocket of Detective Harpers.

In the mean time the chief had telephoned for a carriage, and as soon as Paul was ready they went out and entered it.

They drove over to the very neighborhood where Paul and Harpers had met with their adventures, and through the same streets, and Paul pointed the houses out to the inspector so that there could not be the possibility of a mistake.

That done, they returned to Headquarters.

"Now," said the inspector, "you must go it alone. You have a badge, and are in every sense a member of my staff. Your badge will give you authority to call upon policemen for help at any time. Keep me posted."

"I will do so," Paul promised, and so they parted.

Paul went immediately home. Arriving there, he made himself known to the astonished Mrs. MacGregor, and inquired about Elna. She had not yet been heard from.

Paul realized that he could do nothing more than he had done, except one thing, and that was to send word to Natalie Bakers. That he did, trusting the mission to Mrs. MacGregor.

After quite a conversation with that good woman, in which he gave her some idea of what was going on, giving her points by which to be guided in case Elna should return, or in case of unlooked-for emergency, he left the house and started down the street.

He had not gone far when a heavy hand fell upon his arm.

Turning, he found himself in the grasp of a man whose face he had seen many times at the post-office.

"A word with you," the man said.

"Well, out with it," Paul coolly demanded.

"You are Paul Boothman."

"Who told you so?"

"I don't need any one to tell me. That disguise don't save you. You are my prisoner. Let's have no fuss now, but come right along."

Paul's heart beat fast, and he felt sure that he would have to give in or fight, but he acted quite the contrary.

"You are bellowing up the wrong tube this time, neighbor," he observed, with a light laugh. "See here," and throwing back his coat he displayed his badge.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the other, "is that so? Well, I didn't know, and it's better to be fooled than to let your bird slip through your hand. I had no idea who you were, but if you were Paul Boothman in disguise I meant to nab you; that's all."

"No harm done at all," agreed Paul, laughing heartily. "Such mistakes will occur. I may fall in with you again, as I am after some clew to the whereabouts of that fellow's sister."

"Very likely. Well, I shall know you next time."

Paul went on, and the other detective turned back, very much chagrined over the blunder he had made.

But, how else could he have got over it! Even had his suspicion been ever so strong, how could he arrest a regular officer? Paul now held the trump hand in the game, and it only remained to see how he would play it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SURPRISE AND DISAPPOINTMENT.

About a dozen policemen marched from

Headquarters over to a street on the east side of the city.

There were two in command of the squad.

When they reached a certain corner, they were met by the inspector and four men of the post-office department.

Here the force was divided, and from there went in two directions.

The division under the inspector went to a saloon a little distance down the street, and the division under charge of one of the postal inspectors went to a house on the other side of the block.

They entered the two places about at the same time.

Since we cannot record at the same time what happened in both places, we must take them separately.

When the man in charge of the half dozen who went to the house on the other side of the block from the saloon rang the bell, the door was opened by a very surprised woman of middle age, who raised her hands and exclaimed:

"Goodness me!"

Handcuffs were upon her wrists immediately, and she was taken in by one of the officers.

Then a search of the house was made.

It resulted in nothing. Two men were found in bed, but they swore that they were merely night car-drivers. There was nothing suspicious-looking about the men, the woman, nor the house. It looked to be, as the woman had declared it was, merely a boarding-house.

But, the supreme test was yet to be made. The cellar was to be invaded, and that would settle the case one way or the other. It would prove the truth or the fallacy of Paul Boothman's story.

"Show us the way to your cellar," the post-office man demanded of the woman.

"There is none," was the answer.

"What! no cellar?"

"No, sir."

That was not believed, and in order to save time they parleyed no longer with her, but set out to find it for themselves.

They found it not.

Under the stair down in the basement, under the very stair where Prince Paul had been carried down on the previous night, was nothing but a closet, and that closet was filled with coal, wood, some potatoes and a barrel of flour.

The leader was amazed. He could not understand it. He had had full confidence in Paul's story, but here was the lie given to it point blank.

Had he invaded the wrong house? No, that was impossible, for he had made doubly sure of that before ringing the bell.

What was to be done? Nothing could be done. They had to give an excuse for their raid, and retire.

That they did.

In the mean time, almost the same scene was enacted, with some variations, in the saloon.

On entering, the inspector had arrested every man in the place! They were not many. Then had begun a search of the premises.

It resulted in nothing.

In its general plan, the interior was about as it had been described by the Postman Detective. There was the little room in the rear of the saloon, with the two doors, one leading from the saloon and the other opening into the hall; but there was none that opened upon a flight of steps such as Prince Paul had described.

Here was a puzzle.

The chief did not know what to make of it. There was no doubt about the identity of the saloon, for Prince Paul in person had pointed it out to him. There was no doubt about the integrity of Paul, for Detective Harpers had vouched for that.

In spite of all, however, there was no sign of a door leading to a tunnel under the rear of the building.

The wall was sounded carefully, but it gave the same sound all around, or at any rate there was no spot that aroused suspicion. Simply, there was no door there, and it was plain that there never had been!

But, this was the same room from which Harpers had been carried on the previous night, and it was the same room into which he and Paul had emerged from the tunnel some time later.

For once the police were baffled, and could only retire.

The men in the place were all allowed to go, and the chief—he was in disguise and in uniform—gave some excuse for the invasion, and withdrew.

Later on there was an interview at Headquarters.

The inspector had been in his office but a little time when the man from the postal department entered.

"Well?" the chief interrogated.

"I am puzzled," declared the other, as he threw himself into a chair. "I do not know what to make of it."

They exchanged notes.

It was a case that baffled them completely for the time being.

In the mean time, in another part of the city, a party of men in a room were laughing

themselves hoarse over what they considered a huge joke.

They were the "Lieutenant," Sebastian Hardcroft, and many others of their stamp.

The "Lieutenant" had just come in.

"Hello!" he cried, "what is all this about?"

"Haven't ye heard?"

"No."

"Been a raid on th' den."

"No!"

"Fact. Th' police swooped down there, an' nosed around, but nary a thing did they find. No doubt th' spy that got out along with Harpers reported about th' tunnel, an' they wanted ter look at it. Ha, ha, ha! They couldn't find any tunnel there."

Here was a cat out of the bag, and Hardcroft looked at the man as though he could eat him up, and would enjoy doing it.

"What spy?" demanded the "Lieutenant" instantly. "I did not know there was but one man, and that man was Harpers."

"Some of th' boys thought there was two of 'em," explained Hardcroft.

"Do you know anything about it?" and the "Lieutenant" turned his eyes full upon him in a way that made Hardcroft's flesh creep.

"Not a thing, only what I heard," was the answer, given as coolly as possible under the circumstances. "I know of one man that wasn't there to escape, an' that's enough fer me."

He said this with a meaning accent, as though it must carry conviction with it that there had been no possible chance for escape on the part of his victim.

Indeed, he felt sure of this himself, but there was an ugly doubt that hung on persistently like a thorn in the flesh.

He would have given much to have been sure of the case.

In a brief time the lieutenant was in as great a state of anxiety as Hardcroft himself, and worse. He had fired questions right and left, and soon had the whole story wormed out of those around him.

Calling Hardcroft aside, he demanded:

"See here, Hardcroft," with a determined manner, "I want a full account of that little business. What was done with that fellow?"

Hardcroft gave him the truth.

"I want proof of that," was the next demand.

Knowing that Hardcroft had lied to him in regard to his disposition of Elma Boothman, he had every reason to suspect him in this case.

"I can give it to you."

"When, and how?"

"In half an hour, and by your goin' with me down to th' dock where that ship is ter sail from."

"I'll go with you. I'll have a disguise on in ten minutes, and we'll be off."

The lieutenant went out, and ten minutes later an old man entered the place and motioned to Hardcroft.

Hardcroft knew who it was, and went with him, and in due time they were in a low grogery down near one of the piers.

"Are the men here?" the lieutenant asked.

"There is one," answered Hardcroft, "and no doubt the other will soon be in."

"All right. Introduce me to this one, and let me do the talking."

They went over to where the man was sitting half asleep, and Hardcroft touched him on the arm.

The fellow almost jumped out of his clothes with the start he gave, and both Hardcroft and the Lieutenant laughed.

"Don't be so skart," reassured Hardcroft, "it is only me an' th' boss. This is the man that pays you for that work last night. He wants you to tell him all about it."

For a time the fellow fought shy of any admission, but the Lieutenant finally got his confession, and he gave an account of the crime.

His version did not differ materially from that of Hardcroft.

Before he had quite ended his recital the other one came into the place, and he was called upon to give his account of it.

It was about the same.

The Lieutenant looked puzzled. He could not think it possible that the man had escaped, and yet how came the second man in the tunnel?

"You are sure the fellow's hands were tied?" he asked over again.

"Yes, sure of it," they all affirmed.

"And you swear that you pushed him under the water and under the boards?"

"Just what we did."

"And you left him there and closed the door and put the earth over it as it had been?"

"Exactly."

"Then he is there yet, there can be no doubt about that, unless you have made up this story to work off on me."

They all stoutly maintained that it was the truth, and as he could get no better proof just then, he had to be content. There was a way to get proof, but it was no time now to make the investigation. He would have to wait till the excitement had a little subsided. That plan was, to examine the death-trap and see if the body were there.

If he had not known about Hardcroft's lie in the other matter, he would have been perfectly at ease now, but knowing that, he was far from feeling any comfort in mind.

When he parted from Hardcroft he went home, and when next he appeared upon the street it was as Dunlap Rogerton.

He had important work on hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID.

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

The voice of the housekeeper was heard in the lower hall, in response to the urgent call of Mr. Boothman, and in a short time she was in his presence.

It was the morning following the eventful night, and a little after breakfast-time.

"Selina Peppertree, close the door and sit down," Mr. Boothman said, when the housekeeper had come.

Miss Peppertree did so.

"That was a terrible thing last night, Selina Peppertree," Mr. Boothman remarked.

He had made the same remark twenty times before, at the breakfast table.

"It was indeed, Mr. Horatio."

So Miss Peppertree had twenty times or more replied.

"The more I think about it, the more I tremble, Selina Peppertree. I have no doubt the fellow meant to murder me."

"So it certainly looked, Mr. Horatio."

"And, Selina Peppertree, to think that I have not made my will!"

"Tush! I wish you would not mention your will, Mr. Horatio."

"That will must be made, Selina Peppertree, and it shall be made as soon as I can get around to it now. Just think what might have happened! I tremble to think of it."

"Do not think of it, then, Mr. Horatio."

"Do not think of it! Goodness! I suppose you are not thinking of it, Selina Peppertree; oh, no, of course not."

"But it is different with me, Mr. Horatio."

"How is it different with you?"

"Well, my nature is different, you see. How horrible it would have been for me, if you had been killed! After all the years I have served you, Mr. Horatio, you seem more than a brother to me—much more than a brother."

"We have always got along well, Selina Peppertree, and that is the fact," Mr. Boothman agreed. "I would not really like to have anything so disagreeable and unpleasant happen to you as my being murdered."

"How can you talk of it so lightly."

"I am all seriousness."

"At any rate you ought to be. But, of course you will take such measures as will prevent any one breaking into the house again."

"I shall. It will cost something, Selina Peppertree, and quite a penny, too; but that must not be thought of in a case like this. You will please go around to the locksmith's on the other street, and have him come here and put double bolts on every door and window."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"And, while you are out, see if you can find a morning paper, or a piece of one. Do not buy one, we can't afford that, you know; but no doubt you can find one."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"We will see if there is any account of our adventure of last night."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

"That is all, Selina Peppertree."

The housekeeper withdrew, and soon left the house.

When she had left the room, Mr. Boothman paced the floor to and fro and muttered his thoughts half-aloud.

"There is a mystery here," he mused, as he rubbed his hand across his forehead as though to brush away the cloud that, by its disappearance, might reveal what that mystery was, "and it is one that I would like to understand. Who can have attempted to take my life? What was the object? I would like to know. I have handed the knife over to the police, and I hope they will find some clew and arrest the scoundrel. I will make it hot for him if they do. But, how am I to identify him?"

In this line his thoughts ran, and there is no need to repeat them all. What was at the bottom of it he could not comprehend. If mere robbery, why the knife in hand when there had been nothing to alarm the fellow? There had certainly been no noise, and robbers seldom kill except in self-defense. He gave it up.

In the mean time Miss Peppertree had gone on her errand.

"I wish he had not sent me to Kripps's," she said to herself as she went along, "for he will be sure to make a fool of himself as usual. He thinks he is in love with me, and it is all I can do to keep him out of my way and away from the house. I would not have dear Horatio suspect such a thing for the world. I am all his, and if he won't have me nobody else shall, and that is all there is of it."

Norman Kripps was a locksmith, and a widower. He had quite a family of boys and girls ranging from twenty years down to four,

and what he wanted most was to find a suitable mother for them. In looking around his eyes had settled upon Miss Peppertree as a most desirable addition to his household, and he wanted her—wanted her bad.

He had first made a proposition to her, offering her more wages than she was receiving from Mr. Boothman, to induce her to leave her employ and enter his own. He thought that it would be one step further then to win her heart and hand, and then everything would be as he desired to have it.

Much to his dismay, his offer had been spurned, and to his greater dismay, when he came to declare his love and ask her to marry him, she laughed at him, and refused point-blank to bear to any such arrangement.

But he did not despair, and whenever he could get a chance to speak to her on the street, he brought the momentous question to the front immediately.

And now Miss Peppertree had to go his place of business.

When she entered his shop there was a startling jingle of bells, occasioned by the opening of the door, and in a moment Mr. Kripps came in.

When he saw who it was, his face took on its most agreeable expression, and he rubbed his hands together affectionately, as he said:

"My dear Miss Peppertree, I cannot begin to tell you how very happy I am to see you this morning. It does my heart good. Pray sit down there, and let's have a little chat. You must really excuse my appearance, for if I had only known that you were coming I would have made myself more presentable, I assure you. What is it that has brought about this great pleasure for me? What is your errand?"

The question was forced. Miss Peppertree had stood and stared at him in a manner as frigid as the coast of Greenland.

"If you are done," she now said, "I will state my business, and be off. Mr. Boothman desires you to come immediately and put double bolts on every door and window in the house. It must be done to-day."

"What pleasure that will be!" cried Kripps. "I will come at once—in fact, I will walk back with you—"

"Not by any means, sir. And I warn you not to speak to me while you are in the house!"

With this Miss Peppertree moved off to the door.

"Miss Peppertree, just one word!" pleaded Kripps, as he started to detain her. "Just one—"

"Not half a word," the haughty maid refused, and she whisked out at the door, and shut it after her with a bang.

The baffled locksmith looked after her with longing eyes, and his face was sad, but as he reflected that he was to be employed for most of the day under the same roof that sheltered her, he brightened up, and went about whistling quite merrily.

On her way home Miss Peppertree had her eyes open for a newspaper, but she found none, and had to report that result to her employer.

"Well, never mind, Selina Peppertree," Mr. Boothman said, "we will buy one this time. I think the importance of the case will warrant it. I will use one less stamp than I intended using. That will square it."

Taking two pennies from his pocket, he handed them to the housekeeper, and in a little time a paper was in his hand.

Miss Peppertree stood by while he glanced down its columns, as eager as he to learn whether their midnight adventure had found its way into print.

"Here it is!" Mr. Boothman presently exclaimed, and he read aloud:

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A MURDER.

"The home of Mr. Horatio Boothman was invaded last night by an unknown man, and it is believed that Mr. Boothman narrowly escaped being murdered. He had been down in the lower part of the house, to get some medicine, and was coming up to his room in the dark, when right at the door he ran against a man. They grappled, and a knife was knocked out of the fellow's hand and fell to the floor with a loud noise. This aroused Mr. Boothman's housekeeper, who immediately ran to her employer's assistance, but before they could overcome their burglar—if such he was—the fellow broke loose from them and got away. They did not see his face, and the only clew to his identity is the knife he left behind him. The police are at work on the case."

"See how the paper has got it mixed up," cried the housekeeper. "I did nothing only get in your way. If it had not been for me, I am sure you would have taken the rascal prisoner."

"Nonsense, Selina Peppertree! On the contrary, if you had got there a moment sooner we would have detained him. Still, the report is not quite right, but it is as near correct as newspaper reports usually are."

When they had talked about it for some time the housekeeper went to her work, and Mr. Boothman settled down to glance over the other items of news.

In a few minutes he called out excitedly:

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

Knowing by the tone that the call meant a little more than usual, the housekeeper presented herself with a little more than her usual promptness.

She found Mr. Boothman standing in the middle of the floor, holding the paper at arm's length and staring at it with dilating eyes.

"What is it, Mr. Horatio?" she asked.

"What is it indeed, but that precious nephew of mine," cried Mr. Boothman. "Just listen to this:

"A LETTER-CARRIER ASSAULTED.

"Postman Boothman did not report last night as usual, and one of the detectives of the office was sent out to look for him. His letter-pouch was found, with some of the letters missing, and a leaf was missing from his register-letter book. The young man came in after midnight with a report that he had been assaulted and robbed, and that he had had a narrow escape with his life. What his story was could not be learned, but the officers are investigating the matter."

"There, Selina Peppertree, what do you think of that?"

"I wonder where it can have happened?" Miss Peppertree interrogated.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out. I'm going down to the office, and I'll get it out of them. You remember last night, how we heard him, and then he suddenly disappeared?"

"Yes."

"Well, the chances are that he was assaulted right in this street. I must find out whether he had any letters for me."

Mr. Boothman lost no time in making ready for the street, and in a little while he was on his way to the post-office.

A short time later Norman Kripps came to put on the bolts.

CHAPTER XXV.

DOLLARS CHANGE HANDS.

Elna Boothman passed a terrible night. When the female vulture left her, she felt some relief at being alone, but it was none the less a night of terror.

She slept but little, and that only sitting in the chair where the woman had left her, leaning her head on the bed.

At every sound, and they were many and unusual, she started up, not knowing what to look for next. She felt that her life was in danger, and not knowing anything of her surroundings, except that she was in the hands of enemies, and in the power of a woman who was no woman in nature, knew not the moment when that danger might reach an awful climax.

It is impossible to give a just portrayal of what her thoughts and feelings were, and it will not be attempted. Imagination staggers at such a task.

Morning dawned at last, and never was it more welcome to human creature. The sun came in at one window of the room where she was imprisoned, and its cheering rays seemed to cheer her.

In thankfulness she humbly knelt and prayed, and in that prayer was the petition for a speedy rescue from her terrible dures.

Some time later a key turned in the lock, and the woman came to bring her some food.

"Good-morning, my dear," she said, "how do I find you this morning? I hope you had a pleasant night, and that you slept well."

Elna was in no mood to respond. She knew that it was useless to beg to be set free, and there was nothing else that she would care to ask for.

"Don't feel like talkin', eh?" the old serpent remarked. "Well, I won't insist upon it. Here's yer grub, an' if you want ter keep up yer strength you had better eat it. It is good, and your coffee is hot."

Putting the tray down she left the room.

The smell of the coffee was certainly enticing, and Elna drank some of it. It was good, and knowing that she would gain nothing by refusing to eat, she disposed of all she cared for of what had been brought.

She felt better immediately, and finding that there were water and towels within reach, she made use of them, washing her face and hands and combing her hair.

Now she felt like a new person. In the darkness of the night she had resolved that she would neither eat, drink, nor anything else, and thus oblige them to set her free. Daylight showed her the folly of that plan.

When the woman came back, about an hour later, she was surprised at the alteration.

"Bless me!" she exclaimed, "but you are a real exception to th' rule. How is it that you ain't ravin' an' tearin' yer hair? That is th' usual way."

"I shall not do anything of the sort," returned Elna. "I am satisfied that I shall not remain with you long, and I want to be ready to go out at a moment's notice."

This for a moment rather took the woman by surprise. She did not know but the girl had some help at hand. The next moment, though, she langbed harshly and exclaimed:

"Talk is cheap, my lady. You will go when I am ready, and not before. It will be as I say more than any other way."

"We will see about that. But, you need not remain here; I can spare your presence."

Elna was somewhat defiant, and the woman did not seem to care to remain in her presence longer than necessary.

Elna did not know what to make of this, but considered it a good omen. Had she known that it was to avoid giving way to her temper that the women had left her, she would have been sure that it was such.

The hours wore on, and there was no sign of relief, and no one visited her prison. Her spirits began to droop again, and her courage to give out.

Finally, when she was ready to give way to tears again, her door was opened and two persons entered.

A little time previously Aunty Deerfield had received a notice that some one in the front room wanted to see her. Going in, there was Dunlap Rogerton in his character of the "Lieutenant," and with him a young woman.

"Why, my dear Lieutenant," the woman cried, "I am glad to see you. What is it brings you to me? Business, of that I am sure."

"Business it is," the Lieutenant answered, "and that of an important nature. I have come to relieve you of that prisoner."

The woman looked astonished.

"What prisoner?" she demanded.

"That young lady."

The woman knew not what to say, or how to get around it. The eyes of the Lieutenant were upon her, and she in turn had her eyes upon his companion.

"Really I don't know what you are talking about," she declared.

"Then I will tell you in few words," Dunlap volunteered. "I mean the girl that was brought here last night by Sebastian Hardcroft."

"My dear Lieutenant, I—"

"There, now," Dunlap broke in, "don't add any more lies to your record. You can't give me any bluff about the matter, for I happen to know."

"Who is this?" the woman demanded, jerking her head toward the girl.

"She is a friend of mine, who will take the place of the girl you now hold," was the cool answer.

Aunty Deerfield's eyes opened wide with wonder. She knew that the "Lieutenant" was a cool one, but this was about the coolest thing she had ever heard of.

"Where does my interest in th' matter come in?" she asked. "I expect to get a stake out of 'Croft."

"How much has he agreed to pay you?"

"Well, I would not think of less than fifty."

"Here is a hundred."

As he spoke, the "Lieutenant" counted out that amount in bills, and handed it over to the vulture, who closed her claws over it eagerly.

"Say on," she said, laconically.

"I thought we would come to terms," observed Dunlap, with a laugh. "Are you ready to hear me?"

"That's what I said."

"Very well. Now this young lady here will go up to the room where your prisoner is, change outer garments with her, and take her place. You will then bring the other one down to me, and I will be off."

"But what about 'Croft?'

"He will never know the difference. He never saw the girl before last night, and you can tell him anything you want to. Don't fear but that this one will make him wish he'd never seen her."

"Well, it's all right. A hundred ain't to be picked up every hour in the day. It's a bargain, only you mustn't never let him know."

"Come on, girl," she added, turning to the young woman, "come on an' be made a prisoner."

The girl arose, and followed her out of the room.

"Say, how much are you gittin' out o' this?" the shark asked, in a whisper, as soon as they were in the hall.

"None of yer biz," was the sharp retort, out aloud. "You lead on, old woman, and don't trouble your head about my share in it."

"Ho! you ain't no chicken, you ain't."

The old crow was cut off short, and knew that she had hold of one who would stand no nonsense, and whom she could not scare.

And these were the two who entered Elna's room, as mentioned.

"Come, gal," the woman said, "git up an' let me unlock your foot. Your time has come."

With the fear of death preying on her mind, Elna turned pale.

"I don't mean that you are goin' ter die this minnit," the woman explained, "but I am goin' ter set ye free."

The poor girl could hardly believe that she had heard aright.

"Set me free!" she repeated.

"Jest so. There," as she unlocked the bracelet that was around her ankle, "don't that look like it?"

"I am so glad!" Elna cried. "And do I owe my deliverance to you?" turning to the young

"Hardly," was the short answer. "Don't

ask no questions. Take advantage of th' chance that's offered ye."

"An' jest git out o' that dress an' change clothes with yer friend," the old tiger ordered. "You can't git away unless ye do, so th' sooner done th' better."

The other girl had already begun to remove hers.

"What is this for?" Elna inquired, as she hesitated.

"It is fer yer own good," answered the young woman. "If you don't want ter go, say th' word, an' I will be off. You can't expect to git out unless you go disguised, an' here I am offerin' ye jest what ye want. Don't be afraid o' any skin game—I mean *cheat*, if ye don't know—fer my dress is th' best of th' two by long odds."

This was true.

Elna was only too eager to get away, and the means did not long stand in her path. Anything was preferable to staying there.

As soon as the change of dresses and outer garments had been made, the old woman locked the iron bracelet around the ankle of the substitute, who sat down and began to pore over a novel which she had brought with her.

"Let me know when any one calls to see me," she said to the old tiger, "so I can have time to fix."

"All right, honey, I will; come on, sis," to Elna, and they left the room and descended the stair.

When they entered the room where Dunlap was, that rascal rose and said:

"All this may seem strange to you, Miss Boothman," with a bow, "but it is necessary, in order to effect your escape and at the same time bring the rascals to account for their work. I am a detective. You will come right along with me, and you will soon be with your brother."

Elna was deceived completely, and gladly cried:

"Come, let us go immediately."

Dunlap led her out of the house, and they entered a carriage that he had in waiting and were driven rapidly away.

Barely was that carriage out of sight when Sebastian Hardcroft put in an appearance at Aunty Deerfield's house.

"Well," he asked as soon as he was admitted, "how is the birdling?"

"She is in th' cage," was the answer from the old woman. "Want ter see her?"

"Yes, I'll see if she'll listen ter reason."

The woman went up to the room where the new prisoner was, and told her who had called, and the girl exclaimed:

"Just as I am interested in this story! but, no matter; give me five minutes to prepare for him, and then give him the keys and let him come up."

"All right, honey."

CHAPTER XXVI. CHANGING PRISONS.

AUNTY DEERFIELD went down-stairs again, and told Hardcroft that his prisoner would be ready to receive him in about five minutes.

"How does she take it?" Hardcroft asked.

The tiger shrugged her shoulders.

"How do they all take it?" she made answer. Both of them laughed, and they talked on until the five minutes had elapsed, when Hardcroft rose and said:

"Well, I'll go up an' take a look at her."

"Here's th' keys," said the old vulture, and she handed them over.

Hardcroft took them, and with a grin and a wink left the room.

"Goin' ter let her go?" the woman asked, as she followed him into the hall.

"Well, hardly," Hardcroft drawled.

He went up to the room where his prisoner was, and unlocking the door, knocked for admittance.

"Come in," responded a sobbing voice.

He entered.

His prisoner was sitting on the floor, her face buried in her hands, and hiding in a corner as though she were trying to shrink out of sight.

"Hal! what's that mean?" Hardcroft demanded, gently; "ain't sulkin', are ye? That won't do. You are too pretty to be doin' that. Come, dry yer eyes; I want ter talk to you."

The girl's frame shook with pretended weeping.

"I will not talk until this chain is taken off," she said, between her tearful sobs.

Her hair was down, and as she turned her face only partly around, Hardcroft could get no fair look at it.

"Well, I will do that," he said, "if you will permit me, provided you will promise to talk then. Will you do that?"

"Yes, yes, anything; only take off this horrid chain from my foot."

Hardcroft complied.

"There," he said, "now set up an' dry your eyes, an' don't be a baby any more. You may just as well make the most of it—I mean—the best of it. You can't get away from here, and there is only one chance for you."

"And what is that?" with more sobs.

"You must marry me."

"I will do that. I will do anything to get out of here."

Hardcroft was "knocked out in the first round," so to say. Here was something so entirely unexpected that he did not know what to make of it. Had the girl lost her reason?

"You are joking," he ejaculated, incredulously.

"Try me and see if I am," was the assurance.

"Any fate is preferable to another night here."

"And you will marry me now, at once?"

"Yes, I will," not sobbing quite so hard now; "only let me fix my hair and put on my wrap."

Hardcroft was so amazed that he did not know what he was doing, scarcely.

"We won't have it quite that way, though," he objected. "When you got out you would yell for th' police, an' that would settle th' hull business. No, not quite that way. I will go out and get th' splicer, and we will attend to it right here."

"All right, any way," was the response, "only perhaps I had better go for him and let you wait."

Hardcroft laughed.

The girl was putting on her hat and wrap as she spoke, and was soon ready for the street.

The rascal was not only surprised, but he was greatly amused. The girl had her back toward him, and she had not given him a fair look at her face yet.

When she was all ready she wheeled around and faced him, and in her hand was a cocked revolver.

"That is just the way we will have it," she observed calmly. "You will stay right here, mister."

Hardcroft was paralyzed. This was not the face of the girl he left here on the night before. There were no signs of weeping about the eyes. There was no look of fear.

"Wh—what do you mean?" he cried.

"Just what I say. You git right down there, double quick, and fasten that bracelet around your leg. Don't waste no time."

"Blazes! I won't do it!"

"It will be blazes out of this revolver if you don't do it, and that in a big hurry, too," was the stern retort. "I'll give you ten seconds, and then if you don't do it I'll bore ye."

"If you don't put that thing up I'll choke you!" the baffled rascal cried. "I will cut off your head. I will—"

"Those seconds are creepin' right along, mister," the girl reminded, "and if you want to go on workin' your wind-mill you had better do what I order. Come, quick, or I'll let drive."

"You don't mean it! You don't dare ter do it! You don't—"

"Yes I do, too, every time. What is it goin' ter be?"

Hardcroft could not see through the game. He could not understand what had taken place, but he well knew now that this was not the same girl he had left with the old tiger of the den, and that he was at the mercy of a different sort of person.

"Hold up!" he cried; "I beg off; I'll pay what ye want ter let me out. I tumble, I do."

"There is no pay nor anything about it," was the grim answer. "All you have got to do is to obey orders. If you haven't tumbled you will, an' that is as sure as you stand there. Now, then, mighty quick."

The revolver came up a little higher, and the girl squinted along the shiny tube in a way that seemed to mean business.

Hardcroft gave up, and down he dropped and essayed to put the ring around his leg. It was too small.

"Off with yer boot," was the order.

He kicked it off in a hurry, and the bracelet was in place in a second. As he had the key in his possession he had nothing to fear.

"There, that's biz," remarked the nervy girl, "and now hand over th' keys an' we'll call it square."

"I won't do it!" Hardcroft bellowed. "I—"

The girl came forward, pointing the weapon right at his nose, and ordered him to hold up his hands. He could only obey. Then she thrust her hand into his pocket and took the keys away from him.

"That is th' way we do it out West," she observed, as she backed away from him, "and I leave you th' best respects of a gal from 'Frisco."

"I'll kill you!" Hardcroft raved; "I'll—"

"There, there, don't take on so; you are in a pretty fix to talk about killin' anybody. Ta-ta, I'm off."

She backed out of the door, closed and locked it after her, and faced Aunty Deerfield who had been listening.

"Wasn't that a daisy bluff?" she demanded.

"Who are you?" the old tiger asked, as she drew back from the revolver which the girl still held in hand, a vague vision of detectives and a police court rising in her mind.

"I'm a primrose from yon," was the terse response. "I will allow you to escort me to th' door."

"But, you have got my keys."

"I know I have, an' I am goin' to keep 'em, too. Lead right on, now, and no parley about it."

Up came the revolver, and trembling with

dread the old wretch hastened to obey the command.

The door was soon reached, when the strange girl bade aunty a cheerful adieu, and flitted away down the street.

She was the worst specimen of her own sex that that woman had ever sampled.

But, in the mean time, what of Elna?

No sooner had she entered the carriage than her companion, whom she had looked upon as her friend, clapped to her face a sponge filled with chloroform, and in a moment after one faint attempt at resistance, the helpless girl was overcome and rendered unconscious.

And the carriage rolled on, carrying her where?

It was a daring trick, and that in broad daylight, too.

Just here it may not be out of place to pause to look at the case Prince Paul had on hand, and the darkness in which it was shrouded. He had set out from the office of the inspector with nothing to work upon in the way of a clew, but with lots of pluck and courage and determination, and a solemnly pledged vow that the rascals should be run to earth.

But, on the other hand, see what was against him. Not only had he no clew as to where to go or whom to suspect, but it looked as though there was little likelihood that he would win the game, or, and most important, recover his sister from the hands of the unknown ones who held her.

It looked dark indeed, but, by a few bold moves he was destined to lay the whole plot bare, and win for himself well-deserved praise.

When the carriage stopped it was in front of the house Dunlap Rogerton occupied.

The young and daring rascal got out and entered, and soon came out with a man servant at his heels.

Together, then, they lifted the young lady from the vehicle, and, as though pretending that she was ill, assisted her slowly across the sidewalk, up the steps, and into the house, and that right in open sight, with plenty of persons passing to and fro.

No one questioned the proceeding, and no one had any more than a passing interest in it.

Such things are of daily occurrence in mighty Gotham. The greater the daring, the more the likelihood of success.

When the door closed upon the fair girl, it might have closed as well upon all earthly happiness for her, but it was not so to be. Providence, it would seem, with another girl as its instrument, had a part to play in the game.

Elna was carried up to a room, where she was placed on a sofa, and then the two men gave way to an elderly woman who took charge of her.

"You are to restore her, Madam Grange," Dunlap ordered. "Attend to her every want, and, above all things, see that she does not escape."

The woman bowed, gave her answer that she understood, and Dunlap went out and drove immediately away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PAUL FINDS HIS CLEW.

WHEN Prince Paul set out from the office, he hardly knew what ought to be his first move.

The whole case was in his hands, and it was for him to work it up and bring it to a speedy and successful close.

But, what were the chances for his doing so?

Still, the first and greatest thought in mind was the loss of his sister. If he could only find her!

He could do no more in that direction than he had done, though, and had to be content. The whole police force was on the lookout for her, and by this time all her friends were searching everywhere, and he could do no good by joining them.

What he had to do was the work the inspector had assigned to him, and that, if well done, might be the quickest and surest way of finding the lost one.

As he hurried along, his thoughts were busy with the different points of the case, as they were known to him, and he was trying to decide upon some plan of action—some point where to make the right start.

Some things he had taken the precaution to provide himself with. These were, first a pair of trusty revolvers, some pairs of handcuffs, a pocket-lamp, knife, matches, etc., etc. He might have use for all of them. Certain it was that he could do nothing without the weapons.

Turning the matter over in his mind, he came to the conclusion that he ought to visit the scene of the attack, as there he might perhaps pick up something of value in the way of a clew.

No directions had been laid down for him by the inspector, but he had been left free to choose his own course.

His first move determined, he pushed on with all haste, and in a little time was at the street where his uncle lived, and where he had so nearly lost his life only a few hours before.

On his way he had bought a paper, and looking over it, his eye had caught the brief account of his uncle's adventure.

He resolved to go and see him.

Arriving at the house, he rung the bell, and the door was opened by Miss Peppertree.

Here was a good test for his disguise.

Miss Peppertree eyed him sharply, but there was no sign of recognition in her face.

"Is Mr. Boothman in?" Paul asked.

"No, he is not," was the answer.

"Where is he? I desire to see him. When will he be in?"

This having been Paul's home for years, he knew the habits of his uncle well, and knew that he was not likely to be out a great while.

"He has gone to the post-office," was the information given, "and ought to be back again before long."

"If I may I will come in and wait for him," Paul announced.

Miss Peppertree was wary, and Paul knew her well enough to be sure that he would have to show his hand to a certain extent.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I am an officer," Paul explained. "I am here in regard to that case of last night."

"Oh, are you? Come right in, then."

The door was thrown open, and he made his way into the front room and sat down.

It was some time since he had been in that room, but everything looked about the same as usual. There were the pigeon-holes, with their orderly array of papers, and here was the table with its usual confusion of letters and scraps.

Miss Peppertree handed him a paper, and withdrew and closed the door.

Paul had no interest in the paper, and in truth considered that he was almost wasting time there, but such an unusual event as had occurred in his uncle's house interested him, and he would wait.

He heard some one at work at the windows in the room in the rear, and rightly guessed what was being done. In a little time the workman left the windows and set to work upon the door.

Paul thought he would step out and see who it was, and have a little talk with him while he waited for Mr. Boothman's return.

He did so, and recognized Kripps the locksmith.

"Hard at it, eh, Mr. Kripps?" he saluted.

Kripps looked up, but did not recognize him.

"Yes, hard at it as usual," was the response. "You have got th' best of me, though, for I don't know you," he added.

"Everybody knows Kripps, though," said Paul, laughing, and he did not give him any enlightenment, but added:

"You are fixing things up a little more secure here for the old gentleman, I see."

"Yes, and you can take th' word of Kripps for it that he won't be bothered with midnight visitors any more. No burglar is goin' to get in here now without makin' more noise than will be good for his health."

"I am glad to hear that. By the way, have you paid any attention to find out how he got in?"

"Ob, yes, I looked after that the first thing."

"How was it done?"

"He climbed in at one of the front windows in the next room there."

"Then they were not fastened?"

"Only with the ordinary top fastening, and that could easily be pushed aside with a knife."

The locksmith was going right on with his work while he talked, and as he changed his position a little at that moment he moved the mat that lay in front of the door, and Paul saw the end of a yellow envelope sticking out from under it.

Stooping, he picked it up, and the shock of surprise that he received when he looked at it was not slight.

It was the very letter he had had for his uncle on the previous night, and it had been opened.

How bad it come here? There were two ways of accounting for it. One was, that it had reached his uncle by some means or other; and the other, that it had been dropped by the would-be murderer.

Here was more mystery than ever.

Paul kept the letter out of sight, and soon ended the conversation and returned to the front room.

There he sat down, and as the letter had been opened, and he was now acting the part of a detective, he did not hesitate to draw it out and read it.

The reader remembers what that letter was, and the surprise and emotions of the Postman Detective, as he read it, can be imagined.

Now he remembered what the name of his mother had been, and many other things long forgotten came back to him with sudden force and distinctness.

"What have I discovered?" he asked himself, as he sat and read the letter over and over again. "It seems that Uncle Horatio's hobby is about to amount to something, after all. Here is news for me and Elna, at any rate. Poor Elna! God grant that no harm may come to her! Now I think I have a clew, but I shall know when the old gentleman comes. He can tell me who brought the letter to him, if he has had it, no doubt; and if he has not had it, then I shall use the letter itself as my clew. This

thing is growing interesting. There is no doubt but it is one case—the attack upon me, Elna's disappearance, and the attempt at uncle's life."

So his thoughts ran on, and the time passed rapidly.

Presently he heard his uncle's step, heard him open the hall door, and then heard him call:

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio," came the response from below, and Miss Peppertree climbed the stair to learn what was wanted of her.

"What is it?" she inquired, when she reached where he stood.

"The infernal scoundrels!" Mr. Boothman thundered. "The infernal scoundrels! Do you hear me, Selina Peppertree? I say the infernal scoundrels! and that is what."

"Sh! not so loud," Miss Peppertree cautioned; "there is some one in the room, and Old Kripps is here at work."

Kripps groaned as he heard himself thus spoken of by the object of his love.

"I don't care if there are twenty somebodies in the room," and the words were uttered with force and accompanied by a stamp of the foot, "and as many Krippses at work here; I say the internal scoundrels!"

"Whom do you mean, Mr. Horatio?" the housekeeper meekly inquired.

It was with a pang at his heart that Kripps noted how differently she addressed him.

"Whom do I mean?" Mr. Boothman repeated: "whom do you suppose but those infernal scoundrels down there at the post-office?"

"What have they done, Mr. Horatio?"

"What have they done, indeed! They have done more than enough, be sure of that. I will tell you, Selina Peppertree, I will tell you immediately. They—"

"But, pardon me, Mr. Horatio, the gentleman is waiting—"

"Let him wait, Selina Peppertree, let him wait. I can't see anybody till I free my mind a little. I went down there to the sub-post-office, I did, and I insisted upon seeing the boss of the place. After a good deal of trouble I got in to where he was, and I said, said I, 'I see that rascally nephew of mine has got into trouble.' 'Who are you?' said he. I told him, and then I went on and told him about my expecting letters last night and not getting them, and that I had seen the account in the paper of Paul's misfortune. 'If you get hold of any letters of mine,' I said, 'I want them.' "

Here the old gentleman stopped to puff a little, though he was not fat, and soon went on.

"Well," he resumed, "what do you think he told me? That is to say, what do you think he insinuated? Why, he hinted that he thought Paul had been his own robber, and that when he was caught some of the letters might be recovered. I tell you, Selina Peppertree, he heard from me then. I had to admit that I called the boy a rascal, or something like that, but it was not in that sense, and I gave him to understand that stealing did not run in the Boothman blood. I tell you I was mad. Why, in that room there, Selina Peppertree, are generation upon generation of Boothmans, and not a single incident of theft among them that I have discovered. I tell you, Selina Peppertree, I left that office in a rage, and they needn't have put themselves to the trouble of showing me the door; I was ready to go anyhow."

Paul could not help laughing as he listened to this. His uncle was always ready to take up arms in defense of the family name.

When Mr. Boothman had "freed his mind," he entered the room where Paul was waiting for him, and uncle and nephew faced each other.

Paul was not recognized.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

PAUL rose and bowed as his uncle entered, and said:

"Mr. Horatio Boothman, I presume."

"That is my name," was the response, "who are you?"

"I am a detective, and I am here to look into that mysterious matter of last night."

"Oh, I see. What can I tell you?"

"I have questioned the man who is putting on new fastenings for you, and he informs me that he thinks the robber, would-be murderer, or whatever he was, gained access to the house by means of one of these front windows."

"I am sure they were fastened."

"It is easy to unfasten them, though. Now, Mr. Boothman, I understand that you did not see the man's face at all."

"Not at all, sir."

"And you could not identify him?"

"No, sir."

"And he left no clew behind him?"

"Only the knife, and the police have that."

"Any marks upon it?"

"None that I am aware of. But, you ought to know."

"True; I only wanted to see if you had noticed it closely. Now, Mr. Boothman, did you receive a letter from Clapperhill & Butterton, of London, last night?"

Horatio Boothman was thunderstruck. He

looked upon the detective in amazement, and finally asked:

"What do you know about that letter? How did you know I was looking for such a letter?"

"I have not said that I know anything about it," answered Paul, "nor that I knew you had been looking for such a letter. What I asked you was, whether you received such a one or not."

"I have been looking for a letter from the persons you name," Mr. Boothman owned, now coming to the point, "but I have not received it."

That was just what Paul wanted to know. Now it was pretty certain that the letter had been lost by the person who had tried to murder his uncle on the previous night.

"If that is the case," the Postman Detective observed, "I can tell you something about it that will be of interest to you."

"You can?"

"Yes, sir. That letter was in the hands of the carrier last night when he was set upon, and it was one of the letters that were taken from him—if more than one was taken."

"You astound me, sir."

"I am prepared to astound you still more. I have just found that letter in this house, and opened."

"What?"

"Just what I tell you. I have found that letter in this house, and it has been opened."

"Let me see it."

"There it is," and Paul drew it from his pocket and tossed it across the table.

Mr. Boothman snatched the letter up eagerly, nervously put on his glasses, and proceeded to peruse its contents.

Paul knew there was no use trying to talk to him until he had read it.

As the old gentleman read his nervousness increased, and Paul had never seen him in such a state before.

When he reached the end he let it fall from his hands and ejaculated:

"Well, I'm darned!"

"You seem to be surprised," the Prince observed.

"I should say that I am. To know that this letter was found in this house surprised me, but the letter itself surprises me more."

"Have you any idea how the letter came into your house, Mr. Boothman?" Paul asked.

"I have not. Where did you find it?"

"Under the mat by the door of the rear room."

Mr. Boothman jumped to his feet.

"Do you think it can be possible— But, no, that is hardly to be thought of, for how could he get hold of it?"

"Let me put your thoughts into words," Paul volunteered. "You are wondering whether the man who invaded your house last night can be the one who had your letter, and who lost it in the struggle. To my mind it is very likely that such has been the case. He has had the letter in his pocket, and it has dropped out when he was wrestling with you."

"But, where did he get it?"

"Why, it was taken from the postman, of course."

"And you think he was one of the rascals that attacked Paul?"

"There is no doubt about it in my mind. If not, the letter has been delivered to him by them. It could come here in no other way that I can see. You did not have it before this hour, and of course your housekeeper is a person to be trusted."

"Selina Peppertree is to be trusted, sir. She is a woman among ten thousand. I would trust her with all I am worth, and more."

"So I thought. Then the only way that this letter can have come here is by the way I have suggested."

"I agree with you. But, what mystery is here?"

"It looks as though the Boothman family is wanted out of the way, does it not?" Paul ventured.

"But, with what object?"

"Perhaps you can guess that, since you hold the letter that the would-be murderer was interested in."

"I dare not attempt to guess at it. I do not want to guess at it. Besides, there are more of the Boothman family than the boy and myself. He has a sister."

"Yes, and she has mysteriously disappeared," Paul informed.

"What?"

"Just what I tell you."

"Has the same hand been at work there?"

"It would seem so. And now, sir, I look to you for a clew to this mystery."

"To me? What can I tell you?"

"You can tell me who would be interested in the death of yourself and your dead brother's children. This is no time to hold anything back. You should make me acquainted with the contents of that letter."

"I will do so, gladly. Read it."

Paul took it and read it through again.

"Who is this Rogerton?" he asked, "and where does he live?"

Mr. Boothman informed him.

"Does it not look as though he might be interested in that English estate, if the rightful heirs were out of his way?"

"I do not see how," Mr. Boothman answered. "He is cut off anyhow, and it would do him no good if there was not an heir in the world."

"So it looks. What manner of man is he?"

"He is a harmless old fellow, an engraver by trade, and it looks as though he almost lives in his den of a studio."

"I must go and see him. Now, Mr. Boothman, do not let out what has passed between us. Do not let it be known yet that you have got hold of this letter. With your permission I will take the envelope with me. It may be useful. No need to mention any of this to the police, if any more of them should call upon you. Be silent and wait to hear from me; and, above all things, take care that no one gets another chance at your life."

While speaking, Paul had taken the envelope and put it into his pocket and taken up his hat.

"Why, I was going to see Rogerton, to let him know what I have heard," Mr. Boothman observed.

"I would not do so. Let it rest till you hear from me. By so doing you might upset some plan of mine, and so lessen the chances of our arresting the right man."

"Well, let it be as you say. I have taken one walk to-day, anyhow, and shoe-leather costs money, you know."

Paul had to smile. He saw that his uncle was as "near" as ever in his manner of living.

Taking his leave, the Postman Detective went away, and he could not help the suspicion that had come into his mind against the Rogerton side of the family. His head was in a whirl and his thoughts all in a jumble. One thing was coming upon another so fast, that he half thought that he must be dreaming. But no, the events of the previous night had been only too real.

Leaving his uncle to gloat over the letter that had come to him in such a wonderful manner, he bent his steps in the direction of Jabez Rogerton's studio.

No sooner had he taken his leave than Mr. Boothman shouted out:

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

The housekeeper came out of her part of the house at the call, and ascended the stair.

"Oh! if she would only speak to me like that," moaned in spirit the unhappy locksmith, as he worked away at his task.

When Miss Peppertree entered the presence of her employer she found him walking the floor in an excited manner, holding the letter in his hand.

"What is it, Mr. Horatio?" she meekly inquired.

"What is it indeed!" cried the miserly master of the house. "What is it indeed, I say. Who would have thought that those children of Loyal's would fall heir to a fortune on their mother's side? Sit down, Selina Peppertree, sit down, and let me read this letter aloud to you. You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree, a very good girl. You have been a great help to me in my work, and I do not know what I would do without you. I shall make my will soon, don't forget that. There you are, and now pay attention while I read."

Miss Peppertree was all attention, and Mr. Boothman read the letter aloud to her, after which he told her of the manner of its coming into his hands, and they fell into quite a conversation.

While they were thus engaged there came a knock at the door, and on opening it they found it to be Kripps.

"Done your work already, Kripps?" Mr. Boothman asked.

"No," was the answer, "but one of my children has come for me, saying that I am wanted at the shop immediately on most urgent business. I thought I would step up and let you know that I will soon be back."

"All right, Kripps, all right; only the time you are away won't count, you of course know. Go ahead, Kripps."

Kripps's errand was of importance to our story.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PAUL LEADS A BOWER.

PRINCE PAUL was pushing forward toward the studio of the engraver with all haste, and had just come out upon the street upon which it was situated, when he came to a sudden stop with an ejaculation of surprise.

Just ahead of him was his sister, as he took her to be, walking along at a quick pace.

"Where can she have been? and where is she going?" were the thoughts that came into his mind first.

The next moment there was a doubt as to her identity.

The clothes were the same as he had many times seen Elna wear, that he could swear to, but now that he looked more closely the wearer could not be she.

This person was larger than she, and had not the same graceful carriage, and Elna had never walked at such a pace on the street.

But, the garments. Was it possible that such

a coincidence could occur? The dress, the hat, the wrap, all were the same as he knew Elna had. Could they be her garments on another person?

He would know.

Jumping onto a car that was passing just then, he rode past the girl for half a block and got a good look at her face.

It was not his sister.

Getting off the car, he walked back to meet her, and as they came near he stopped and stared at her steadily.

The young woman returned his stare, and as she came up, said:

"I hope you'll know me next time."

"I want to know you this time," Paul boldly returned. "You are not wearing the same clothes you had on yesterday."

It was an impudent shot, but Paul knew that if these were his sister's clothes his observation could not be otherwise than true.

"That is none of your business," was the independent retort.

The Postman Detective saw that she was a tartar.

"I am not sure about that," he answered. "I happen to know whose garments these are, and I am interested to know how you come by them."

In spite of her nerve and "cheek" the girl turned a little pale, and Paul was quick to note it.

"It is of no use for you to try to deny it," he added. "for I have got you down fine. What I want to know is, where is that other girl now?"

"See here, mister," the girl answered, now coolly enough, and with all her assurance at her command, "you are barkin' up the wrong tree, sure as you live. I don't know anything about what you are talkin' about, an' if I happen to have on togs that look like somebody else's, is that any reason why you should jump on me? I reckon not, and you had better get your stakes up and pull out."

"You are from the West," Paul noted.

"Right you are," was the return, "an' I am able to take care of myself every time. Now if you have had your say, jog along."

They were speaking in low tones, and no one could overhear them.

"Not quite so fast," admonished Paul. "I have more to say to you. I am not taking a bluff so promptly. I want to talk with you. It may be to your interest, too."

"Well, say on, then."

"In the first place, there is no use your denying anything about the clothes you have on. Now that I can see them closely, I know them. In the next place, the police of this city are looking everywhere for the owner of these clothes, and the sooner you get them off, the better it will be for you. I suppose you can understand that."

"You bet."

"Well, I am disposed to let you down easy. If you will come to terms with me, and put me on the track of that girl, I will share whatever reward is offered."

"Who are you?"

"Paul gave her a glimpse of his badge.

"Whew!" the young woman whistled, "that knocks. I reckon I had better make a deal with you. If I had had a few minutes more, though, you wouldn't found me in th' togs."

"It will be the best thing you can do," Paul assured. "You will come to terms or I will arrest you, that is the long and short of it."

Having identified his sister's clothes beyond a doubt, he did not mean to let their wearer get out of his sight.

It was a better stroke than he had dreamed of making. It was something that was beyond his wildest thoughts.

"Well, what is it you want to know?" the girl demanded.

"I want to know, first of all, where the owner of these clothes is."

"She is right here," was the terse reply. "I am the owner of them now."

"How is that?"

"Why, it was an even swap, you see. We changed, an' th' other gal got the best of the bargain by long odds. My own togs wasn't no slouch, and it was about dollars for cents, so far as the trade went. But, I made it up on the other dicker."

"What other dicker?"

"Why, you don't suppose I made such a trade for fun, do you?"

"You were paid to do it, then?"

"Cert."

"Who paid you? Come, I don't want to have to pump every word out of you; go ahead and tell me all about it."

Just then the girl's eyes were dilating with wonder, and were fixed upon the charm that was attached to the chain Paul wore.

"Where did you get that?" she asked.

"Oh, I picked it up at a bargain this morning," Paul answered, pretending not to be interested, while in truth his heart was beating at its fastest.

What revelation was coming?

"I have seen it before," the girl rattled on, and then she came to a sudden stop. "Are you giving me a straight story?" she demanded.

"It is just so straight," answered Paul, firmly, "that if you don't unwind immediately, I will take you in. You can depend on that. Let us have no foolishness."

"Then I'll unwind. I thought you might be the same feller in a different rig, that's all. The one that paid me to change places with the girl had on that same chain and charm yesterday."

"And who was he?"

"I don't know. He was called the 'Lieutenant,' and that is all I know about him."

"Let us walk on," said Paul, at this point. "We are beginning to attract attention. What I want to know, and first of all, is, where is that girl now?"

"I don't know."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"I am."

"Where did you see her last?"

"In a house, about half an hour ago."

"See here," cried Paul, impatiently, "go right ahead, as I told you to before, and make a story of it. Give me the case in as few words as you can."

Plucky and independent as she was, the girl saw that she had run against a snag—so to say, and wanted to get out of it. At the same time she had her eye open for business.

"Did you say there was money in it?" she asked. "That is what I am after in these days, mister."

"There will be a pair of hand-cuffs and a jail in it," was the reply she got, "if you don't come to the point."

"Well, if I have got to squeal, we may as well go right back to that house as to walk away from it," she observed, and she turned face about.

Paul was right along with her.

"I'll give it to you just as it is," she said, as they went along. "I fell in with the Lieutenant for the first time yesterday afternoon, at a saloon on the Bowery where I have been waiting on table ever since I struck the town. This morning he came there, and said he had a job for me, and that there was a hundred in it. I was ready for the job. He said there was a girl in a certain house, held as prisoner by a wizened critter, and he wanted to get her out. He wanted me to go there with him, change rigs with the girl, take her place, and let her go. I agreed to it."

"Then she is alive and well?" Paul asked.

"She was an hour ago. Well, we went to that house, and an old chromo took me up to the room where the girl was, after she and the Lieutenant had come to an agreement, and I changed with the gal, and she dusted out with the Lieutenant. She had been secured in the room with a chain fast to her foot, and I put the chain on mine, and sat down and went to reading a book that I had brought along. By and by a codger came in and wanted to make love to me, and wanted me to marry him right on the jump. I agreed, and when he had taken th' chain off my foot I pulled a barker on him, and made him put it on his own. Ha, ha, ha! if you could only have seen how he was cut up over it!"

The strange girl laughed heartily as she recalled it, and seemed to enjoy it immensely.

"Then you do not know where that young lady was taken, eh?" Paul asked, his hopes centered on what the answer might be.

"No, I do not," was the reply. "My part of it ended right there. I had corralled my hundred, and that was all I cared about."

"Have you told me the whole truth?" Paul asked, in an impressive manner.

"That's what I have, mister," was the terse assurance.

"Well, let me tell you one thing. I do not know much about the West, but what you have done is a serious thing here in New York, and you could be sent pretty high for it. If you will come right over to my side for another hundred, and help me to find that young lady, I will see that you get off."

"It's a bargain. I hadn't no idea that I would git nabbed, you see, but now that I am, I am willin' to sell out cheap."

"Well, I mean what I say. Help me, and your part in the game shall be overlooked."

"I'm with ye, mister, and ready for business. What is that girl to you?"

"She is my sister."

There was something in the blunt manner of this young woman that won Paul's confidence to a certain extent, and he meant to try her.

"You are not to let that fact out, though," he added, "for I don't want it known."

"I'm mum."

Short, sharp, but right to the point, were her answers.

Paul questioned her closely, found where she was employed, and arranged with her that she was to help him find the owner of the watch and chain. But never a word said he about there being a murder in the case. He was afraid that that would scare her off, if she really meant to serve him, which he could not be sure of till the test came.

In a little time they were at the house of Aunty Deerfield.

CHAPTER XXX.

PRINCE PAUL OVERREACHED.

WHEN Prince Paul and California Kate arrived at the house of Aunty Deerfield, Paul was surprised to meet at the door no less or greater a person than Kripps the locksmith.

By the way, "California Kate" was the name the strange girl had given him in answer to an inquiry as to who she was.

Kripps had reached the door just a moment ahead of them, and was waiting to be admitted.

Aunty Deerfield came to the door in person.

She evidently expected the locksmith, for she admitted him immediately, but as soon as he had passed in she stood in the way of Paul and California Kate and demanded to know what they wanted.

Paul was in no mood for trifling or for being trifled with.

"We want to come in first of all," he said, as he pushed the woman aside and entered, Kate following him.

"You had better be keerful who you are pushin' around," the old vulture warned. "I am mistress of my own house, I think."

Her eyes flashed as she spoke, and she showed her teeth much like a ferocious wild beast.

"As for you," she added, "you had better be scarce around here when that man gets loose;" and she turned to Kate.

"Don't trouble your head about me," returned the girl, fearlessly. "I can take care of myself, I reckon."

Kripps was standing a little further back in the hall, waiting to learn what was wanted of him.

He had been sent for in haste, with the word that he could earn five dollars in as many minutes, and not being at home, one of his children had gone for him, as we have shown. This was the house where he was wanted.

"I see you have got a locksmith on hand already," observed Paul, indicating Kripps, "and we don't want to interfere with his work, madam. Lead right on up to the room where the prisoner is, and we will follow you."

The woman looked troubled, but she put on a bold face and cried:

"I don't know what you are talkin' about, an' the sooner you get out of my house, the better. You are drunk or crazy, and you want to take yourself right off."

"You are wrong all around," returned the Prince, "and now if you don't want to get into trouble, lead on."

With these words Paul displayed his badge to her startled gaze.

"This is your work, you cat!" she hissed, turning upon Kate.

"I couldn't help it," was the explanation. "He got the deadwood on me, and what could I do?"

Just then a bellow was heard from above.

"Come, you old crow, you! are you ever comin'?" cried the voice of Sebastian Hardcroft.

"Lead right on," ordered Paul, displaying a pair of handcuffs, "or there will be more trouble out of this matter than you want."

The woman was cornered, and had to obey.

She started up the stairs, and stopped before a door.

"This is th' room," she said, "but I can't git in. This cat carried off th' key."

"Right you are," owned Kate. "In we go," and she took a key from her pocket and opened the door.

There stood Hardcroft, raving like a madman, chained to the wall by one leg. He had worked himself into a fever of rage.

California Kate was the first one he saw.

"Blazes devour you!" he cried, "but you shall suffer for this trick. Do you mean to tell me," addressing Aunty Deerfield, who followed right behind Kate, "that this is the same girl that I left with you last night? Oh! you have got a locksmith at last, have you?" as Kripps went in right behind the old she tiger. "But, he ain't needed now, as this girl has brought back the keys. Oh! but you—"

He came to a sudden stop and his jaw dropped. Prince Paul entered the room last, and was swinging the pair of handcuffs around in his hand.

Hardcroft's face turned a yellowish pale.

"Tricked I" he exclaimed. "Are you one of 'em?" scowling at Kate.

"Nixey," the girl answered, "but I had to blow out or go to th' jug."

"Well, you'll go to th' jug, anyhow," Hardcroft growled, "for that is th' way with th' long-noses. No doubt he's promised you he'd let you down easy."

"No matter what our understanding is," broke in Paul, "I am a man of my word, and whatever I have promised I will do. Allow me to put these ornaments on your wrists, my gentle friend."

"Not by a good deal!" Hardcroft cried, and his hand went behind him as though in search of a weapon.

"Hold on!" ordered Paul, covering him with a revolver in a fraction of time, "let us have none of that. Up with your hands."

There was that in his manner that made Hardcroft tremble, and he obeyed the order.

Paul stepped forward, and in an instant the handcuffs were upon the fellow's wrists.

"Now," he said, addressing Kate, "you may take off the chain."

The girl did so."

"It looks as though I ain't wanted now," observed Kripps.

"You set down," directed Aunty Deerfield, "I have a door I wanted fixed when this circus is over."

There was meaning in this, but no one then understood it. Kripps obeyed, and took a chair in an out-of-the-way corner.

When Paul had handcuffed his man he allowed him to sit down, and backed to the door and locked it. He knew that he was in a bad place, and would not put too much confidence in any one. He would be on his guard.

"Now," he said, when that was done, "I want to question you, my man, and you had better give me straight answers. Where is that young lady that you brought here?"

"I don't know," Hardcroft snapped.

"Who hired you to bring her here?"

"I won't tell."

"You will be made to tell, and you may just as well make a clean breast of it here and now."

"I might do that on condition that I was to go free."

"There will not be any such condition about it. If you are not disposed to talk, we will be off."

Hardcroft was in a bad fix. He dared not expose the "Lieutenant" on account of the murder he had a hand in. Nor did he want it to come out that he had taken the girl on his own responsibility.

"I might be willing to change a few pointers with ye," he observed.

"What do you want to know?" Paul asked.

"I want to know who it was took th' girl away from here."

"You ought to know that well enough," put in Kate; "she took herself away—if you mean me."

"Hang you! I don't mean you. I mean the first one."

"Why, I let her go," said the girl, smiling.

"I thought you was one of 'em. Well, go ahead, and all you git out of me you are welcome to."

"What I want to know is, where that young lady was taken to from here?" and Paul now turned upon Aunty Deerfield. "If you know anything about it," he said sternly, "you had better let it out. I have another pair of 'cuffs that will about fit you."

"I don't know nothin' about it," was the stubborn response.

Paul turned back to his prisoner, and as he did so he caught the fellow's eyes upon his watch chain and the charm that was attached to it.

He saw that the fellow recognized it.

"Where did you get that?" Hardcroft boldly asked.

As he knew nothing of the horrible story connected with the chain, he was in no wise afraid to own that he recognized it.

"Get what?" asked Paul.

"Why, that chain and charm."

"Oh, I picked them up at a bargain this morning. Why do you ask? Do you recognize them?"

"I thought I had seen them before, that is all."

"Whose were they?"

"No matter about that. I am likely to be mistaken."

The fellow had suddenly decided that it might be wise for him to say but little.

Paul had a move to make, and he watched for the effect of it.

"I will tell you whose they are," he said; "they belong to your friend the 'Lieutenant'; the fellow whom you assisted last night in putting that young postman out of the way."

The man's face paled again, but he tried hard to keep a steady nerve.

"I don't know what you are talkin' about," he declared.

"Yes, you do, too," Paul insisted, "and your neck is in danger. Don't let the idea of turning State's evidence get into you head, either," he added, "for you come in too late to play that game."

Hardcroft's forehead was bathed in a dew of perspiration. What did this all mean? Was it a bold bluff? Or had some one "squealed?" He could not know. What was certain about it was that he was in a bad fix, and there did not seem to be any way of his getting out of it.

"If you know what you are talkin' about," he returned, "it is more than any one else does, I guess. If you want me, take me; you won't get nothin' out of me."

"Very well, come along."

Paul moved toward the door.

"Hold on," the fellow bade, "mebby you would like ter trade me off fer bigger game. If you would, I think we can come to some understandin'."

"Whom do you call bigger game?" Paul asked. Carelessly, not caring to show that he felt much interest.

"Well, th' 'Lieutenant', fer instance."

"Too late there, too," Paul bluffed. "I guess you don't know anything that we haven't found out already. Come along."

Paul partly turned to open the door, hoping that he would bring the man to just the place he wanted him, a confession of the whole matter, or as much of it as he knew; but just then something unlooked-for happened.

Aunty Deerfield, who had evidently been watching her chance, rushed suddenly upon the Postman Detective, gave him a hard push, and sent him crashing against the door of what had seemed to be a closet. The door gave way with a crash, and Prince Paul went down and down into a hole of densest darkness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONE GOOD HAUL MADE.

THAT sudden act on the part of Aunty Deerfield was a surprise to all present, and to no one more than to Hardcroft.

The face of California Kate blanched for an instant, but she quickly recovered herself.

As for Kripps, he was as pale as death, and sprung forward as though with a desire and impulse to rescue the victim.

Such were his promptings.

"Stand back!" Aunty Deerfield ordered, "or I will send you to join him."

The woman's eyes were flashing furiously, and the locksmith drew back.

Stepping to the door, the woman closed it, and no one coming in a moment later could have suspected that such a tragedy had taken place.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Hardcroft, "but that was a surprise, aunty, a surprise indeed. I did not know you had things so handy here."

"I am not to be taken in by any such fellers as that," the woman answered, in a hard tone. "If they have got any more of 'em, let 'em send 'em along."

"It was about the cutest trick that I ever saw," laughed California Kate. "I wonder where he is by this time? Does that hole go right through to China?"

"Then you don't stand in with him?" Aunty Deerfield asked, in some surprise.

"Nary. Do I look like that sort o' critter? You have got me out of his grip in fine style, and I won't forget it. But, where does the hole go to? I am anxious to know. This town beats all I ever struck."

"It goes right down cellar, that's where," the old tiger explained, "and that feller is done up for keeps. He'll never peep again."

"Serves him right."

"See here, though," broke in Hardcroft, "your chinnin' don't help me any. I want these things off o' my hands. Hold on there, locksmith, where are you goin'? We ain't done with you yet."

Kripps was edging toward the door, anxious to get out of the place.

"Hold on, there, mister," ordered California Kate, drawing her revolver upon him, "don't be in such a rush. We want to use you. You just set to work and file these ornaments off o' this gentleman's hands."

There was no way out of it, and Kripps had to obey. He came back, and taking a sharp file out of a little bag he carried, set to work.

It did not take him a great while to perform the task, and Sebastian Hardcroft's hands were once more free.

"Thank goodness I am well out of that fix," he exclaimed. "I shall not forget what I owe to you, Aunty. But, what are we to do with this tinker?" indicating Kripps.

"We ought to serve him in the same way," observed Kate.

"Right you are, but I guess he will know enough to hold his tongue," the old woman made answer. "I know him, and it will not be well for him if he blows out what he knows. Kripps, you have a family, and if you want to live to provide for them, keep your head shut. Do you understand?"

"Y-yes," Kripps answered, pale and trembling.

"He is all right, I can see that," Kate said in. "Let him go, for he won't dare to toot his horn."

"Yes, take your things and git," the old woman ordered.

"But, where's my pay?" Kripps reminded. "When you remind me that I have a family, you also remind me that it takes money to feed 'em. A little hard cash will come in handy. I don't work for fun."

"I forgot that," said Hardcroft. "Here, take this and be off," and he handed the locksmith a five-dollar bill for his work.

"Thanks," said Kripps. "If you get into any more sich fixes, just let me know and I'll be on hand."

"All right, git."

Kripps lost no time in "getting," and was glad enough to shake the dust from his feet. He was almost overcome with the horror of what he had witnessed, and the fear he had had that he might share the same fate.

But, for once Aunty Deerfield had mistaken him. She knew that he was not over strong-

minded, and relied upon his fears to keep his tongue silent in regard to what he knew. On his part he meant to expose it immediately. One reason for this was the fact that he had seen the detective before at Mr. Boothman's, and had taken a liking for him. And, too, he knew that he was the man who was working in Mr. Boothman's case.

What he did was to go straight to Mr. Boothman and tell him what had happened, and Mr. Boothman's action was prompt. He sent Selina Peppertree to notify the police immediately.

Soon after Kripps had gone from the house, Hardcroft took his leave, being more than anxious to see the "Lieutenant" to put him on his guard. Here was a police detective wearing his watch and chain. There was something in that more than the wily rascal could understand. But, he knew that it meant danger, unless the detective's clew had perished with him.

He did not know how much the "Lieutenant" knew of his double-dealing.

When he went from the house, California Kate remained. Her excuse was that she wanted to see Aunty Deerfield on business, and did not want to be seen on the street until she could again change her dress and hat.

No sooner had Hardcroft left the house, however, than she whipped out her little revolver, pointed it at the head of the old she-tiger, and commanded:

"Now, you old scorpion, you, lead the way down to where that young detective is, or I will cause you to spring a leak in about two winks."

Aunty Deerfield reeled back as though shot already,

"W-what!" she gasped, "after you even made that fellow set 'Croft free at th' pistol point?"

"Jest so," was the calm and terse rejoinder. "That was a bluff. Come, now, no monkeyin', or down goes your dog house."

That gleaming weapon was full of terrors for the old serpent, and she could see no way out of her dilemma. The girl had spoken barely above a whisper, and had warned her not to call for help. What could she do?

"But, what's the use?" she protested. "He is dead as a doornick by this time, and you wouldn't want to see him."

"Are you goin' to do as I order, or shall I drill some holes into you?" Kate demanded.

"But, you won't blow on me?" the old woman began to bargain.

"All I want is to get that fellow out of the hole you have put him in," was the answer. "I don't care what becomes of you. Come, now, mosey, and no tricks, unless you want to know how lead feels."

"Wait till I call one of the girls to bring a lamp."

"Wait for nothing. And if you open your head to call any one, I will solder it up with lead."

"But, we must have a light."

"Well, there's a lamp up in that room where I was, for I saw it. Go and get that and light it. I am right behind you, don't forget."

The old crow was in a fix that she did not know how to get out of. She dared not disobey, and it was worse than pulling teeth to do as ordered. She wished that some one would appear in the hall to her assistance.

But, no one did, and she had to do as directed.

When she had lighted the lamp, she led the way down the stair again, and on around and down into the cellar.

Kate followed right at her heels.

The girl looked for some trick at any moment, but she had warned the old bag in such determined tones that she would surely shoot her if she attempted anything of the sort, that she was cowed.

Arriving at the bottom of the cellar, she flashed the light around, pointed to a door at the furthest side, and said:

"You will find him in there, or all that's left of him. Here is th' key. Go on and do what you please with him."

She extended the key and the lamp as she spoke, thinking that her device was too deep to be seen, but the girl drew back a step, raised her weapon and answered:

"That is a cute dodge, Aunty, but it don't work. You can't get out of my sight. I will take the lamp, however," reaching forward and taking it, "so that you can't put it out. Now, go right on and open the door. Here's five pills o' lead behind you, so don't fool about it."

With a muttered curse of disappointment the she-tiger went on and opened the door.

A horrible hole was disclosed to view. It was intended to contain coal, ostensibly, but there was only a little in it now, and on that lay the body of the detective.

"See if he is dead," the girl ordered.

With a visible shudder the woman stepped in and laid her hand on his breast.

"No, she answered, "he is alive."

"Is there water down here?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, then, see here: You call for one of your servants to bring some. If you have got any servants, and if there is any good brandy in the house, have that brought, too. I will have my weapon out of sight when the person comes down, and she needn't suspect anything."

Do you understand? Don't try any games, for I mean shoot."

The woman raised her voice and yelled for "Hanner!" and when "Hanner" answered, told her what to bring.

In a few minutes the order was carried out, and when "Hanner" had gone back whence she came, then the old tigress set about her disagreeable task of bringing her enemy back to life.

California Kate directed her, and when, a second time, some of the brandy had been poured into Paul's mouth, he opened his eyes and looked around.

The last he had known was when he was falling down, down, and now it was some moments before he realized where he was, or what had happened.

When it came back to him, he struggled to his feet. By rare good fortune no bones were broken, and in a little time he was himself again.

"How do you pan?" California Kate asked. "Are you all right, after your big tumble? That was a bad one, but here is the old dame that sent you down, and you can do what you please with her."

Just then there came a heavy knock at the door, and Aunty Deerfield gasped:

"The police!"

"So much the better," said Paul, as he put a pair of handcuffs on her; "come right along with me."

"I won't go!" the old wretch screamed. "You can't make me go! See how you treat me after th' way I've brought ye to."

"At pistol's point," put in Kate.

The old woman hung back, but it was of no use. Paul dragged her up to the ball, and in a short time she, with all her household, was taken in charge by the police.

Paul remained behind to brush himself up a little, and having allowed Kate to go, left a policeman in charge of the house, and set out to take up the trail again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A WOMAN'S REVENGE.

"LIEUTENANT, you owe me ten dollars."

In a room in the rear of a saloon quite a number of men were collected, and a group at one of the tables consisted of the Lieutenant and the two rascals who had attempted the murder of Detective Harpers.

"I owe you ten dollars!" repeated the Lieutenant. "What do I owe you ten dollars for?"

"You don't remember that bet of ours, do you?"

"No, hang me if I do!"

"Where's yer watch an' chain?"

The Lieutenant sprung to his feet with an oath.

"Was that your work?" he demanded. "I have been wondering all day whether I had left my watch at the house or not, and haven't had time to go and see. When did you take it?"

"Last night, in th' cab. You made a bet with me that no crook in New York could lift your watch, and I bet that I could do it; and havin' such a good chance last night I couldn't help doin' it."

"Well, dast your check, anyhow! Where is the watch now? Here's your money, so hand it over."

The man was laughing heartily, but when he thrust his hand down into the side pocket of his coat, his laughing ceased instantly, and his face seemed to freeze in a sort of frightened grin.

"You haven't lost it!" Dunlap thundered.

"I certainly have," was the frightened answer.

"If you have, by Harry I'll kill you!"

"When I took it I slipped it into this pocket, and I didn't think about it again till just now when you comed in. It is gone, and that is a fact. All I kin do is ter pay ye th' vally of it. It's a rich joke on me, by great it is."

Dunlap's first suspicion was that the man meant to try to cling fast to it, but when he offered to pay for it he knew that that was not the case.

The young man's face was pale.

"What if you lost it there," he said, in a hoarse whisper.

The fellow seemed struck dumb with terror.

"It couldn't be," he gasped. "I would 'a' felt it drop. No, somebody has gone through me an' took it."

At this the "Lieutenant" looked relieved.

They were talking on, when who should enter in breathless haste but Sebastian Hardcroft.

"What's up now?" demanded Dunlap anxiously.

Somehow it began to look to the young villain as though the very earth were slipping out from under his feet. He had never experienced such a sense of insecurity in his life.

"Everything is up," panted Hardcroft. "Do you know where your watch is?"

The three men turned pale, even to their lips.

"Where is it?" the "Lieutenant" asked.

"One of Inspector —'s detectives is wearin' it."

Had a bomb come flying in upon them, their consternation could not have been greater.

"That is to say," Hardcroft went on to explain, "he was wearing it a little while ago, but I guess now it adorns the body of a corpse."

This was said in an undertone, of course.

"How is that?" asked Dunlap.

"Why, Aunty Deerfield dumped him down into her coal-hole, from the top story, or nearly so."

"Hal! that is better. But, what was he doing there? And what were you doing there? Come, Hardcroft, you are holding something back."

Dunlap fired in these questions before Hardcroft could recover himself to get his answers into shape.

"No matter what that part of it was," he evaded, "I have come here to put you on your guard. You had better get another watch as soon as you can, and deny under any and all circumstances that you have lost one."

"That is a good idea, and I will act upon it. By the way, have you found that rosebud yet, Hardcroft?"

"W-what do you mean?" that rascal gasped.

"Just what I say," was the response. "You needn't think that you have shut my eye, Hardcroft, for you haven't. Knowing that you had lied to me, you two-faced cur, I thought I would take charge of the lady myself."

"Then it was you—"

"You bet it was, and it will be me a good deal more, if I find that you have put up any job on me in regard to the other side of it."

"No, that was a square deal."

"Well, I can't prove it now. I can't say that I wholly blame you in the other matter, for the prize is worth the risk. You and I are out on important jobs, hereafter, though."

"So be it," retorted Hardcroft, and he turned and started out.

"Hold on," ordered Dunlap, "one word more."

"Well?" as Croft came back.

"Don't think that you can turn, for that is not to be thought of. You have got hold of a sword that cuts both ways, and is sharp on both ends."

"I'm no fool," was the brief response, and he went out.

When Hardcroft reached the sidewalk he was in a half-dazed condition. How had his little game been discovered by the "Lieutenant"? It was too much for him. And what had he done with the girl?

"By Harry! but I would have her away from him yet," he muttered, "if I could only lay my hands on her."

It was not likely that he would be able to do that, however.

"Hal!" he exclaimed, as a sudden thought came to him, "I can have revenge, and of the best sort, too. I will put Sally Truffles onto him."

Sally Truffles has been incidentally mentioned before, but it has not been necessary to introduce her. She was a songster in a variety theater, and was set down on the bills as "Maud St. Clair." She and the "Lieutenant" had been the best of friends of late, and Hardcroft knew it.

The rascal knew where to find her, and away he went with his purpose in mind.

More than once he had acted as go-between for Dunlap, and had no difficulty in getting an interview with his little beauty, as he called her.

"What have you, some word from my friend?" she asked immediately.

"Well, hardly," Hardcroft drawled. "You are overboard there, my little one."

Sallie turned pale.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that your nose is out of joint, that is all. You have been supplanted by a newer charmer."

The little singer flushed, and clinched her hands till the blood almost started through the skin.

"Tell me all about it," she demanded. "Do not keep anything back. He shall not play me false in that way. Are you out with him, that you tell me this?"

"Yes, clear out. I may say that I am fired out. Well, pay attention, and I will give you the case just as I understand it. I can't tell you where he has got his little bird, however."

"No matter, I shall be able to find her."

Hardcroft went ahead and told her all he could, rubbing it on as thick as it would bear, and she was in a perfect rage of jealousy by the time he had done.

"That will set somethin' in motion," he mentally observed, "and if there ain't fun it won't be my fault." And fairly hugging himself with satisfaction, he went on his way.

Sallie Truffles knew about what course to take, and half an hour later saw her at the door of Dunlap's house.

"I am here with a personal message for that young lady," she said boldly.

"Who is it from?" asked Madam Grange, with caution.

"From Roger," was the immediate reply.

"Well, I will take it to her."

Sallie had made a ten strike. She had found the girl at the first effort, and had given the best possible excuse. She had a veil over her face, and was not sure whether the woman recognized her or not. Nor did she care.

"No, I am to deliver it to her myself," she said. "Please let me see her as soon as possible, for I am in a hurry."

"Well, come in."

She entered, and following Madam Grange up to the second floor, was let into a locked room.

"Knock when you want to come out," Madam Grange said, as she shut and locked the door after her.

Elna was there, sitting in silent despair and looking out at the window. She looked around to see who entered, and Sallie held up her finger for her to be silent and bear what she had to say.

"Are you here against your will?" she asked, in a whisper, advancing toward the prisoner.

"Yes," Elna calmly answered.

"Then you will not refuse my offer to help you to escape?"

"No."

She was neither eager nor excited. Her suffering had begun a reaction, and her brain felt numb.

"Then change garments with me as quickly as you can, and go out and make your way to your home as speedily as possible, before you are discovered."

"What is your object in this?" Elna asked, as she proceeded to obey.

"Revenge!" was the answer. "I do not propose to have any one share his love with me."

Elna saw that this was escape indeed, and she became more eager.

"You are more than welcome to it all," she said. "Tell me what to do to make my escape sure, and you may rely upon my doing it."

In a very few minutes they had changed clothes, and Elna was ready for the venture.

She rapped at the door, and it was soon opened.

"Are you ready so soon?" Madame Grange asked, and she looked in to see that her prisoner was all right.

She saw Elna, as she supposed, looking out the window as she had been doing all day.

"Yes, I am ready," the escaping prisoner responded; "the message I brought was brief."

"So I should think. Do you know when Mr. R. will be home?"

"No, as he did not say."

Two or three more questions and answers were exchanged, and then Elna was on the outside of the house in safety. She walked calmly away, but as soon as she was out of sight from that house she increased her pace and hastened homeward.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GOAL REACHED AT LAST.

SELINA Peppertree had been thinking.

She felt that she was a woman who had been grievously wronged.

Here she had spent her life, and she might say, in the employ of the man she loved, acting as his housekeeper, when the desire of her heart was to become his wedded wife.

She had given him hints by the thousand, but never had one of them taken effect.

She knew that she was necessary to him, now, after so long service, and so did he; but there seemed no prospect that their relationship as master and servant would ever be changed.

But, she had been thinking, as we started by saying. Could she not force her plans upon him? That is to say, could she not bring him to terms, and oblige him to marry her to protect his own interests? She could do no less than try, at any event.

Having laid out her plan of action, she only waited for the proper moment to put it into operation.

Along in the afternoon, when Mr. Boothman was in his room at work, and Kripps the locksmith was at work in the lower hall, Miss Peppertree went to inquire what her master would like for his supper.

She knocked at the door, and was told to come in.

"I have stepped in to ask what you would like to have for supper," she said, when she entered the room.

"What would I like for supper?" the genealogist repeated, as he straightened up from his task of copying the family record of Jeremiah Boothman, 253. "What would I like for supper, Selina Peppertree? I hardly know. What would you like, Selina Peppertree?"

"Oh! it is not what I would like or dislike, Mr. Horatio; it is for you to say. I am merely your servant, sir."

"You are more than my servant, Selina Peppertree, a good deal more than my servant!" Mr. Boothman exclaimed; "you are my companion and helper in my genealogical work. You are a good girl, Selina Peppertree, a very good girl, and I want you to bear in mind that I have not yet made my will. You shall not be forgotten, Selina Peppertree."

"I wish you would not mention your will again, Mr. Horatio. But, what shall it be for supper?"

"Well, name something, Selina Peppertree, name something."

"Shall it be some nice hot biscuits, my own make? A nice sliced pineapple? A little beef and some cheese? With a cup of tea, of course."

"Would bananas cost more than the pineapple?"

"Two cents more, Mr. Horatio."

"Then we will have the pineapple, Selina Peppertree."

Miss Peppertree withdrew, closing the door after her with a little noise, but not allowing it to catch, and when she let go of it it swung open about an inch.

She smiled at the success of her plan so far.

"Well, Mr. Kripps," she saluted the locksmith, when she reached the lower hall, "how are you making out with your task?"

Kripps was amazed that she should speak to him so gently, and replied:

"Oh! I am getting along as well as can be expected, Miss Peppertree. There is no happiness in life for me, you very well know, and it does not matter whether I get along well or ill."

Miss Peppertree was watching the streak of light on the wall that came through the slight opening in Mr. Boothman's door.

"You should not allow your spirits to droop in that manner," she returned. "This is a world of hope, you know."

"Yes," sadly, "we hope, only to die in despair at last."

Miss Peppertree was taking no care to speak low, and pretty soon the streak of light on the wall grew broader. She knew that she had attracted the attention of her employer.

"But, you were quite jolly this morning, Mr. Kripps, for I heard you whistling away at a great rate. One would not think that you were sad then."

"My heart was aching, and I whistled in my misery," the locksmith responded. "Oh! Miss Peppertree!" and he dropped his tools and faced her, upon his knees, "why will you remain so hardened to my pleading? You know that my heart is breaking with love for you, and that it would be heaven on earth for me if you would only be my wife. Say that you will, dear Miss Peppertree, and make me happy. Oh! then would I sing like a lark in the morning."

The streak of light on the wall grew very broad indeed.

"But, Kripps," Miss Peppertree deliberately answered, "would it be right for me to leave Mr. Horatio, after serving him for so many years? He has been kind to me, and this seems so like home."

"Kind indeed!" growled Kripps, "how could he help being kind to you? Haven't you been his willing slave all these years? Could he ever replace you if you left him? The old miser! It would serve him right to let him shirk for himself awhile. Would you not rather be a loved and honored wife, Miss Peppertree, than a mere paid servant?"

"Oh, Kripps! such a dream of happiness is not for me!"

"It is for you, my sweet—my own! Oh! say that you will be mine!" and he dived forward and grasped her hands.

The streak of light on the wall could not grow any broader now, and Miss Peppertree felt that the eyes of Mr. Horatio were upon her.

So they were. Mr. Boothman was standing at the top of the stair, his eyes dilated, his hair almost on end, and trembling in every limb.

"But, it is so sudden, Kripps," Selina parried. "What can I say? I must not break the news too suddenly to Mr. Horatio. Oh! what would he say? I am sure he would never forgive me. Kripps, for he considers me a good housekeeper—at any rate he tells me so, and I am sure it is his plan to keep me as long as he lives."

"Of course it is," cried Kripps. "He would keep you in bondage forever! But, here I offer you life, liberty, and happiness as my wife."

Selina thought of that household of little Krippses.

"Oh! say that you will be mine!" pleaded Kripps, as he fondled her hand.

"I will think about it," answered Selina, as she drew away. "I will think about it, Kripps, and I will let you know. But, you must not build your hopes too high. I promise you nothing, you know. I will merely think about it. I know it would be hard for Mr. Horatio, and it would be hard for me to leave so good a home, even though I am only a servant here. I will think about it, Kripps. And now not another word, for Mr. Horatio might overhear you. I must go to the store."

"Do not disappoint me," Kripps pleaded, "pray do not, for I would surely die. All my earthly happiness depends on you."

"Sh! not so loud," warned Selina; "not another word, Kripps."

She left the locksmith, then, and went into the kitchen, and he began singing as merrily as a bird.

Mr. Boothman tip-toed back into his room, softly, grating his teeth and with his hands tight clinched.

"The cur!" he hissed, when he had shut the door, "to think that he could aspire to such an

honor. Why, he has more nerve than I have ever had. She has always been so prim and precise. Why, I do not remember that she ever in her life called me Horatio without the "mister" tacked onto it. But, we will see what we shall see, my tinkering locksmith; we will see what we'll see."

Horatio Boothman's eyes were wide open, literally as well as figuratively, and he saw Selina Peppertree in a new light.

Miss Peppertree went out to the store, made her purchases, and was careful to avoid Kripps for the rest of the day.

About an hour before supper-time Mr. Boothman called:

"Selina Peppertree! Selina Peppertree!"

"Yes, Mr. Horatio."

So the housekeeper responded, and in a few moments she was in his presence.

"Close the door, Selina Peppertree, and sit down," Mr. Boothman directed.

Selina obeyed, tremblingly. She felt that the critical time was at hand.

"Selina Peppertree," Mr. Boothman began, "you have been a good girl, a mighty good girl, indeed."

"I am sure I have tried to please you, and do my duty," was the answer.

"And you have done it, too. On my part, I have tried to be kind to you, Selina Peppertree, and your wages have been paid promptly on the day. Is this not so?"

"It is so, Mr. Horatio."

"Well, Selina Peppertree, I have been thinking of late that what I want—that is to say what I ought to do—in other words—"

"About your will, Mr. Horatio? I have told you a hundred times not to mention it again."

"No, not that. You see, Selina Peppertree, I and that boy of Loyal's are the only ones left of our branch of the family; that is, males."

"Yes, that is so."

"And if that boy should die, or if he never marries, our branch of the family is bound to die out."

"Yes, Mr. Horatio," and Miss Peppertree had to hang her head to hide the flush of her cheeks.

"And, ahem! in such a strait as this I have been thinking seriously that I—that I ought to—that is to say—"

"Induce him to marry, Mr. Horatio? I think so myself."

"No, dast it all not that at all, Selina Peppertree; he can go to the dogs if he wants to. What I want to say is that I—ahem—that I ought to marry."

"Oh! Mr. Horatio!"

"Do not be alarmed, Selina Peppertree, do not be alarmed, for I do not intend that you shall lose your situation. Where in the world could I get another such housekeeper to fill your place? What I am coming at, Selina Peppertree, is this. Will you be my wife?"

The housekeeper grabbed up her apron and buried her face into it as deep as she could. This almost took away her breath, and her joy almost overcame her. She felt that she was the happiest of mortals.

"What do you say, Selina Peppertree?" Mr. Boothman demanded, eagerly.

"I do not know what to say," Selina faltered. "This has come so sudden. It is the second offer that I have had to-day."

"What! What is that you say?"

Mr. Boothman played well the part of surprise and ignorance.

"Mr. Kripps has asked me to marry him."

"And what did you tell him, Selina Peppertree? What did you tell him?"

"I told him that I would not give him an answer yet. That I did not want to leave you suddenly, and that I was not sure that I would want to go anyhow. That it was so like home here—"

"Goodness me! Selina Peppertree, would you think for one moment of mothering all that household of little Krippses? Indeed, you shall not leave here at all. Will you marry me, Selina Peppertree?"

After due maidenly shyness and hesitation, the housekeeper answered that she would.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PRETTY CLOSE SHAVE.

DUNLAP ROGERTON wanted to learn for himself something about the detective who had been wearing his watch and chain, and who had met his fate in the den of Aunty Deerfield.

Accordingly, as soon as he could get away from his men, after having coached them well in the parts they were to play in order to keep suspicion from their door, he set out for the old she-tiger's place.

When he arrived there he met a surprise. The house was shut up, and a policeman was in charge.

His footing seemed less secure than ever. What was coming? Had he not better take French leave while there was time and while the way was open?

But, pshaw! what had he to fear? What crime could they fasten upon him? No, he would brave it out, and let them do their worst.

There were some things that had to be attended to, however, and they were these: He must make sure that Paul Boothman was dead;

he must get home and see that the girl was safe, and take steps to have her further removed; and then the old man Boothman must be removed from their path.

These steps were necessary to the success of their scheme, and it was important that the scheme should be kept rolling, now that it had been started. That London letter had to be answered, and plans set on foot for the getting hold of the money.

It was too big a game for him to think of dropping it, or of letting anything stand in the way of its success.

Then, too, he must see Sallie Truffles, and post her in the part she had to play. And hers was to be no easy role. Something of that has been explained.

Dunlap himself was to take the place of Paul Boothman, and the girl Sallie was to pass as his sister.

He would make a visit to Sallie at once, and then would go and see his father and have a consultation with him.

Another point, by the way, was to go and see California Kate and learn how she had come off at the hands of Hardcroft. That was right on his way to the place where he would find Sallie Truffles, and he would drop in there first.

When he came to the saloon he sauntered in, and looking around, soon espied Kate. She had on a white apron, and was waiting upon the customers of the place.

She gave him a nod of recognition, and he went over and took a seat at an unoccupied table.

At another table not ten feet away sat Prince Paul.

"Well," Dunlap asked, "how did you make it with that fellow?"

"I made it all right," Kate answered, as she leaned over his table and wiped it with a towel she carried; "I put the darbie on to his foot, and left him there. He bi'led clear over, when he found how he was trapped."

"Yes, and then you came back with a detective, or sent one back there, and the place has been pulled. What do you mean by such work as that? Are you playing a double game? If I thought so, by Harry I'd—"

"There, now, don't bu'st," Kate admonished. "If you have seen your man, as of course you have, didn't he tell you how it was? But, then, he didn't know all about it, and so I'll tell you myself."

"Go right ahead and let's hear about it."

"Well, when I got out of the place I struck a bee-line for this cache, for I wanted to git that gal's togs off as soon as I could, but I hadn't gone far when a detective grabbed me and threatened to run me in. You see he was on the lookout for that lost critter, and recognized the togs."

"Yes, I see; and what then?"

"Well, it was a run-in or a give-away; and I thought I'd give away. I knew you and the gal had got out of danger, so I took him right to the den and let him into the facts of th' case. He gobbled up that man of yours in no time, and no doubt would have run us both in but for the old chromo. She jumped the detective, bounced him down into a death-trap, and your man and myself got away. That's the long and the short of it. What's your order? I can't stand and chin. Business is business, you know."

Dunlap ordered some wine, and Kate went to get it; and as she returned she passed right close to the table where the Prince was sitting and whispered:

"That's him."

The Postman Detective took in the words, but made no move whatever, and the girl went right on to the other table, where once more Dunlap engaged her in conversation.

What followed was not important, and Kate was sharp not to let him suspect that she had rescued the detective, or that she had been on hand at the "pulling" of the saloon.

Explaining how that had come about, she laid it all upon Kripps the locksmith; where, of course, it directly belonged.

When he had finished his wine Dunlap sauntered out of the place, and Paul did not fail to keep him in sight.

The latter had a cab in waiting, and getting in, motioned to the driver the person he wanted to follow, having previously explained something of it to him.

There are cab-drivers in New York who enjoy nothing better than helping at detective work, and this was one of them.

Dunlap went right home, and the cab, going on past the house, turned the next corner, and stopped just where the door of the house could be watched.

"Well, Madam Grange, how is the patient—rather the birdling?" Dunlap inquired, as soon as he entered and met his housekeeper.

"She is safe and well," was the response. "There has not been the least bit of trouble with her. And she has scarcely cried any at all since you sent that message to her."

Dunlap was amazed.

"What message?" he demanded. "I have sent no message to her."

The woman looked troubled, and turned pale.

"Why a young woman came here," she informed, "said she was from you, and said she had an important message for the prisoner. Of course I believed her, knowing that no one could have any knowledge about the girl's being here. But, there was no harm done, for she went right away again, and the girl is up there just where you left her."

"It is strange," Dunlap mused. "It is something that I cannot understand. But, let's go up, and I will get the secret out of the girl herself."

"Come right along."

The two went up-stairs, and Madam Grange unlocked the door of the room where the girl was, and they entered.

Dunlap drew a breath of relief when he saw the girl sitting in the window, and so did the woman. She had had a fear that something might have happened. It might be that the caller had brought poison with her.

Seeing that she was there and all right, Madam Grange withdrew, saying that she would be within hearing if needed.

"Well, my little dear," Dunlap said, "how do you do? You do not seem to be entirely unhappy in your new home."

"Oh, bless you, no!"

As the girl said this she turned and faced him, laughing, and to his greatest surprise Dunlap found himself face to face with Sallie Truffles.

"Thunder and Mars!" he ejaculated.

"I thought it would surprise you a little," Sallie laughed. "It will do you good to see the sort of stuff Maud St. Clair is made of."

"It is the worst thing you ever did in your life," Dunlap grated, white with rage.

"How so?"

"Why, you have taken fortune right out of my hands."

"The dickens I have!"

"Yes, the dickens you have; and the dickens take you, too!"

"You don't mean that."

"I don't eh? You will find that I do. I shall put you out of doors, and I never want to see your face again."

The girl was pale but determined.

"You won't do anything of the sort," she stoutly declared. "You won't dare to. If you had a game on hand, why didn't you take me into it, and then there could have been no misunderstanding. I thought you had a new mash here, and I am not the one to share the object of my love with another. You have found that out."

"How did you know that any one was here?" Dunlap demanded.

"Why, your precious lackey, Hardcroft, put me up to it."

Hearing the loud talking, Madam Grange had crept back to the door to listen. Her heart was in her throat. Now she saw it all. The real prisoner had slipped right out between her fingers, as it were.

With trembling haste she withdrew to the lower part of the house, and waited for the storm to burst upon her head.

"Hardcroft shall pay dearly for it," Dunlap hissed, "and so shall you. I allow no one, man nor woman, to interfere with my business in this way."

"What are you going to do about it?" Sallie coolly asked.

"What am I going to do about it! I have told you what, and you will see it for yourself in about no time."

"And what am I going to do then? I know just a few of your secrets, Roger, and I will let them out as sure as you stand there, if you turn me off."

Dunlap bit his lips and paced the floor in his rage. He realized that the little vixen had him on the hip, and he did not see his way out of it just then.

"Really, though, Sallie," he said, calming down and taking a seat, "you have knocked a fortune right out of my hands and your own, too. I was going this very hour to see you, but I met a person in a saloon who said you were not at home. I was going to let you into your part in the game, and then we would have set to work. You have lost us a quarter of a million, at least."

"Wbew! Well, I am awfully sorry, but how was I to know? You ought to have put me up to it. But, is it too late yet? I will help you all I can."

"You ought to have had your wit about you in the first place. It may not be too late if we can get hold of that girl again, but the chances are that we shall not be able to do that. She will be on the lookout, now, and so will the police. Worst of all, she may bring them here at any minute!"

"Mercy!"

"Well you may exclaim. We have got to get right out of here, and I shall not dare come here again. I will post Madam Grange what to do with my things. Lucky the furniture isn't mine. Come, on with your hat and wrap, and let's slopo."

The girl obeyed quickly enough, and when Dunlap had given Madam Grange some hasty instructions, they left the house.

The cab followed them.

Within half an hour the servants had been dismissed and sent away, and a truck had called and taken away a number of trunks, and the house was deserted.

Not half an hour later the police came down upon it, only to find that their prey had escaped their claws.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PRINCE'S MASTERLY STROKE.

PAUL BOOTHMAN'S heart beat fast when he saw his man come out of the house, in company with a young woman.

Could that be Elna?

At that distance he could not be sure, knowing that his sister would now be in strange attire when found, but from the description of the garments that had been furnished him by California Kate, he thought that it might be.

Still, there was one thing against it. That was the manner in which she went off with her companion. It could not be Elna, and yet he must make sure.

Calling to his driver, he told of his suspicion, and explained what he wanted. The cab rattled forward and passed them, giving Paul a chance to see the girl's face to good advantage.

It was not Elna!

The cab drew up to the curb on the opposite side of the street, waited until the pair had passed on some distance down the street, and then resumed its way, keeping them well in sight.

They walked to the destination of the girl, a hotel on the Bowery that actors of her class patronize. There they parted, the young man continuing on his way.

It may be well to keep in mind that the Postman Detective did not know who Dunlap Rogerton was. He had as yet had no chance to learn much about him. The little he knew he had got from California Kate, and her knowledge of him was exceedingly limited.

But, he cared not who he was. He was the man who had carried the watch and chain that had been found in the pocket of Detective Harpers, and that was enough for him to care about. He was determined that he would not lose track of him.

As they rode along, Paul wrote a note to the police captain of a near station, directing him to take in all persons at the house Dunlap and the girl had just left, intending to send it by the cabman as soon as he dismissed him. That was done later.

Dunlap went immediately to the studio of his father, and Paul got out of the cab, sent the cabman on the errand, telling him to come back there immediately.

Prince Paul's mind was busy enough. The game seemed now to be coming near home. Here was this "Lieutenant" entering the shop of the engraver whom Horatio Boothman had visited, and whose name was mentioned in the letter from London.

What did it mean?

"Whatever is in it," the Postman Detective muttered to himself, "they shall not escape me. My life has been attempted, so has that of Uncle Horatio, and for all I know my sister may have been murdered ere this. No, I will run them to earth. I will know the secret, and I will have the men who made that cowardly and dastardly attack upon poor Harpers."

But, how should he proceed?

He gave that careful thought for a moment, and hit upon a plan.

The day had been speeding along, and Paul had stopped only long enough in his work to eat one hasty meal at a restaurant during the forenoon. He was hungry now, and tired, but that was not to be thought of. With such important work on hand, he could stop for nothing.

He did, however, buy some fruit at a stand, as he stood waiting for his cab to return, and ate that.

It was now just growing dusk, and night would soon once more cover the mighty city.

When the cabman returned, Paul gave him orders to wait, and entered the hall of the building in which the engraver had his studio.

There he put on a gray beard that he had in his pocket, took off the watch chain from his vest, and went silently up the stair.

Arriving at the door of the engraver's den, he applied his ear to it and listened.

The father and son were already having quite an exciting interview.

"Lost!" Paul heard the young man exclaim.

"Yes, boy, lost," was the answer.

"Where can you have lost it?"

"I do not know. I put it in my pocket with care, making sure that it was in a sound one, but now it is gone."

"And everything depended on that letter," Dunlap exclaimed. "With that gone, we dare not make a move."

They were not talking in loud tones, nor yet in very low ones, and Paul could catch their words thus far without trouble.

At the word "letter" a sudden revelation flashed upon his mind. Had this person lost it in his attempt at murdering his uncle? He must know more about this precious pair.

"That is so," the engraver agreed. "But, how are we to get hold of it again? I would

give a fortune, if I had it, to know where I lost it."

"Have you no idea where?"

"I have one terrible fear."

"And what is that?"

Prince Paul could not catch the reply.

"Great Scott!" the young man exclaimed, "is that so?"

"It is exactly so. I thought I would make clean work of it. You know a good job can be done only on a good, clean block."

"Yes, I know, but it seems to me that everything that we touch falls to pieces in our hands. I have a mighty bad piece of news for you, too. Your lost letter is not the only thing that is missing."

"What do you mean?"

"I have quite a story to tell you. Some of our work has got to be done over again. Hardcroft played us false in one respect, but I outwitted him and got the upper hand, when no sooner had I done that than I got tripped up myself."

"What are you talking about, lad?"

"About that girl."

It was only by pressing his ear close to the door, and straining every power, that Paul could catch what was being said.

"What about her?" demanded the engraver in louder tones.

"Not too loud," Dunlap reminded. "Why, he did not dispose of her, as he said, but took her for himself, and when I found that out, I took her from him on the sly. Then he, out of revenge, put Sally Truffles up to my game, and what did she do but set the girl free!"

Paul drew a full breath of relief. Did they refer to Elna? He had no doubt about it, and an exclamation of thanksgiving escaped him.

After that their voices sunk so low that he could not overbear what they said, though he listened for a long time.

When they spoke aloud again they said nothing of importance, and it was clear that the younger man was about taking his leave.

Paul had framed a plan of action. He meant to arrest them here and now, and take them to Headquarters before they could communicate with any of their allies further than they might already have done.

He gave a loud knock at the door.

Startled exclamations were heard, and then he was bid to come in.

Opening the door in a deliberate manner, the Postman Detective stepped within, bowing as he did so, and saying:

"Good-evening. I hope I don't intrude, gentlemen."

"Not at all, sir," answered the engraver; "but, whom have I the honor of addressing, sir?"

"First let me be sure that I am right," Paul parried. "Is this Mr. Rogerton's office? And are you he, sir?"

"I am Mr. Rogerton, sir, and this is my studio," was the affirmation.

"And this younger man?" indicating Dunlap. "One of your employees, I presume. Pardon my asking, but my business with you is important."

"He is my son, sir," explained the older man. "And now," he added, "what can we have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"I have come here with something that I think may be of use to you." Paul responded, and as he spoke he drew the envelope of the London letter from his pocket.

The eyes of the two men fairly bulged.

"Where did you get that?" Mr. Rogerton eagerly demanded.

"That does not greatly matter," Paul answered. "I found it in such a way and under such circumstances that I knew this was the place to bring it. Of course it will be worth a trifling reward? I shall not refuse one."

"Yes, I shall give you a reward. Let me have the letter."

Paul had put a piece of folded newspaper in the envelope, and he handed it over without hesitation.

The engraver took it eagerly and thrust it into his pocket.

"I will double the reward, if you will tell me where you found it," he promised.

"I will do that later," said Paul. "I have something else here, and something that perhaps your son would like to have returned to him, and which may earn me another trifling reward."

Saying this, Paul drew out the watch and chain that belonged to Dunlap.

That young villain was as pale as death, and his face twitched nervously.

"Who are you?" he cried.

"Do not get excited," admonished Paul, in the quietest of tones, "but hear me out. I have not yet told you how these things came into my possession."

"We do not care a snap about that," cried Dunlap; "what we want to know is who you are. It will be well for you to talk fast, old man, or there may be more trouble in this than you imagine."

"Easy, lad, easy," the worthy father cautioned.

"My young friend," rebuked Paul, returning

the watch to his pocket, "you are too impatient. You have both recognized these articles, and I am now doubly sure that they are yours, and that there is a reward here for me. I shall insist upon a good one. I have yet one more article, though, and that is this."

With this he flashed a cocked revolver in their faces.

"Up with your hands," he commanded, "or as sure as the dome of Heaven is over us I will blow your brains out."

They instinctively obeyed.

Paul placed a whistle to his lips and gave a sharp, piercing blast.

"Who in fires are you?" Dunlap almost screamed.

With one hand Paul snatched off his false beard, and answered:

"I am Paul Boothman, at your service."

Heavy steps were heard on the stair, and a man burst into the room. It was Paul's cabman.

Paul handed him two pairs of handcuffs, telling him to put them on the men, and the cabman sprung to obey.

Too surprised and frightened to think of resistance before, the sight of the handcuffs made the rascals desperate, and they threw themselves forward, Dunlap reaching for a weapon. They were willing to take the risk of being killed, and take the one chance in a hundred for escape.

But they were foiled. Paul dealt Dunlap a blow in the face that made him reel back; the cabman already had the father on the floor; and in less than half a minute the rasacly pair were securely handcuffed together.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THINGS COMING TO A FOCUS.

PRINCE PAUL looked upon the pair with an air of satisfaction.

"There you are," he observed, "and your little game is nipped in the bud. It will be the best thing you can do to make a clean breast of the whole matter."

At first the two men raved like madmen, and bitterly cursed their luck. Then they changed their tunes, and began to plead to be allowed to get away out of the city, and out of the country, too, if need be.

"Well, hardly," Paul returned, in response to their pleadings. "You are wanted on several charges, and it is no use for you to look for mercy at my hands. In the first place, you at tempted to take my life. Then you abducted my sister, with the intention of killing her, or worse. Then you attempted the life of my uncle. Then, on the top of all these, you are wanted for the murder of Danton Harpers."

"It is a lie!" Dunlap cried. "We had nothing to do with it."

"That remains to be proven," said Paul.

"But you forget that we are relatives," broke in Mr. Rogerton. "The same blood flows in our veins."

"I am not proud of you as such, I assure you," answered Paul. "But, even were we brothers, I would deal with you the same, after what you have done."

"But, come, what proofs have you against us?" demanded Dunlap.

What Paul's proofs were the reader has seen. It could not be said that he had any proofs positive, but he had sufficient circumstantial evidence to warrant him in arresting the two rascals.

"They will be forthcoming all in good time," he made answer. "What we have to do at present is to take care that you do not get away from us. Cabman, go for a policeman."

The exultant cabman started to obey, and pending his return, Paul sat down and kept guard over his prisoners with a revolver in hand.

There was little likelihood of their escaping from him.

In a little time the cabman returned with a policeman, the prisoners were taken out of the place, Paul locked it after them, and they set out for Headquarters.

The prisoners were put in the cab, which proceeded at a walk, Paul and the policeman walking alongside of it, and in that manner the distance was traversed.

The hands of the prisoners being secured, Paul had no fear that they could do any harm to themselves.

When they reached Headquarters the man Paul most wanted to see was not there, but he was sent for, and soon arrived.

"Ha! what is this?" he exclaimed; "arrests already?"

"Yes, sir," answered Paul; and then he explained who his prisoners were, and told all about them.

"You have done remarkably well," was the compliment he received. "I see that our confidence in you was not misplaced. I had no idea that we should hear from you so soon. Why, you have had only time to make a beginning."

"And that is about all I have made, sir," answered Paul.

"But a mighty good one."

"Will you take charge of these prisoners? And do you think I have sufficient proof against them to warrant their being held?"

"Sufficient proof! Why, you have got enough to hang them, almost. They shall both be taken good care of, never fear. What is your plan now?"

"If you will have these men taken from the room, so that we can talk in private, sir, I will tell you."

"Just as you desire," and a bell was tapped.

"Do not have them taken out of the building, though, for we shall want one of them again."

"All right."

An officer entered in answer to the bell, and he was told to take the prisoners into an adjoining room and hold them there till wanted.

They were taken out.

"Now," said Paul, "I will give you my plan. I propose to change clothes with that young man, and act his part for a little while."

"Scott! but that is a dangerous role."

"I know it is, but it promises big. I want about four of your men to follow me, to be ready to lend me their help at a moment's notice—"

"You shall have a dozen if you want them."

"Four will be enough. But, that can be attended to later. If you agree with me in my plan, I will now make the change of clothes with my prisoner."

"I agree that it is a good idea, but, as I said, it will be the most dangerous plan you could undertake. Are you nervy enough for it?"

"I will do it at any risk," was the answer.

"Have him brought in."

Word was sent out, and in a few moments Dunlap Rogerton was brought into the office alone.

"Take off his handcuffs," was the order given.

It was obeyed, and the young rascal found himself free, so far as the use of his limbs was concerned. But there was no chance for him to think of escape. The eagle eyes of the chief were upon him, and he held a revolver in hand.

"It will be worse than useless for you to try to escape, young man," was the caution given, "for I will shoot you at the first move in that direction."

"I am not a fool," Dunlap growled.

"So we are aware, but we know that you are a knave. Now we want you to disrobe and let us have the use of your clothes for a time."

"By Harry! but I will do nothing of the sort!"

"Oh, yes, you will, too. Come, now, off with them, or we shall have to do it for you."

Dunlap saw that it would be folly to refuse further, and with muttered curses he proceeded to obey.

Prince Paul did the same, and in a few minutes the exchange had been made.

"Will I pass?" Paul asked, when he had done.

"No," was the reply, "you need a finishing touch. We will fix you up in a little time."

Certain directions were given to the officer there, after he had replaced the handcuffs on the prisoner's wrists, and he went out, soon returning with another man.

"Griggs," ordered the chief, "I want you to make this man that man's double. They have exchanged clothes, so give attention to the head and face only."

The man bowed, and proceeded to do his bidding.

It did not take him long. The two young men were not greatly unlike each other, and a little alteration of the hair and mustache of Paul, with a touch of something on the face that produced the change of complexion, and it was done.

Dunlap had the pleasure of looking upon his double, or upon the man who was as near such as art could make him.

"Good!" exclaimed the chief, "you are bound to pass, if you can play the part well, if you do not, it will be death to you."

"You can bet your life on that," growled Dunlap.

The prisoners were ordered taken away, and the master of the game told Paul to sit down.

"I have news for you," he said. "Your sister has turned up all right."

"I am glad to hear that," Paul answered, "but it was not quite news to me. I knew she had escaped." And he told about that.

"It was a lucky thing all the way around," the chief observed, "for you might not have found her easily."

"You are right. But, how is Harpers?"

"He is better. It is thought that he will pull through. I have just been to see him, and he asked for you. I guess he is troubled about you."

"I hope he will come out all right. But, what about my men? I must keep this ball rolling, now that I have started it. I must have that man Hardcroft next, and then for the minor rascals."

"You talk like a veteran at the business. The men shall be on hand in a little while, and then I will bear how you lay out your plans."

The two talked on, Paul telling all that he had learned, and giving the various phases of the case, and the inspector commenting upon them, and giving hints and points of advice.

While they were thus engaged, four men came in.

"These are the men who will help you," the chief said, and he introduced them by names. "Gentlemen," he added, "this is the young man who is filling Harpers's place, and he is doing it with credit, too. It is my desire that you act under his instructions in the case he has in hand, and do your best to bring him success. You will lose nothing by it. Sit down."

They all shook hands with Paul, and sat down.

Then their chief put the case before them, and when he had done so, turned to Paul, saying:

"Now they are yours. Instruct them as you please."

Paul's position was a delicate one. The least error in his judgment would lay him open to ridicule. Any one of these men, he felt sure, could take the case and do it more credit than he.

These feelings he openly avowed, begging indulgence, and then went ahead and laid out a line of action. That is to say, such a line as could be laid down for a general guide. The details would depend upon immediate circumstances, of course, when the time of action came.

"Good!" the chief exclaimed, when he had heard it all. "I could not have done better myself. By pretending to be just a little under the influence of wine, and a good deal out of temper, you will have a shield for any blunders you may make in the role, as you say. Then your plan of dealing with Hardcroft is good, too. You will soon find him. After that the rest will depend on your nerve."

When their conference came to an end, the five men set out, and their work was before them.

Paul's first move was to go to the place where Sallie Trutles was stopping, to see her.

He found her and she did not penetrate his disguise.

"You are still angry with me?" she interrogated, lovingly.

"I don't feel in the best of tempers, and that is truth refined," Paul answered. "I want to see 'Croft immediately, and I want you to go for him. Tell him to meet me at the studio."

"I will do it. But, when shall I see you again?"

"I cannot promise you. Perhaps soon. I am in a rush now."

With that Paul hasted away, for he did not like the idea of being mistaken for a lover by the girl. It was clear that she loved Rogerton, and if she should discover the deception there would be trouble with her.

As it was, though, he could trust her, and in a little time later he and his men were in the engraver's studio, waiting for their men to come.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FINAL GRAND ROUND UP.

PRINCE Paul had the game in his own hands now.

It only remained to carry out his plans successfully, and he would bring the case to a successful termination.

Two of his men were ready to retreat to a handy closet when required, and the other two had chosen a place behind a broad desk in one end of the apartment.

In about an hour there was a step on the stair, and they retreated in haste to their respective posts.

There was a knock at the door, and Paul invited the person to come in.

Enter Sebastian Hardcroft.

The room was not brightly lighted, and Paul was pacing to and fro across the floor.

"Well, here I am," Hardcroft announced, as he threw himself into a chair.

"So I see," returned Paul. "I sent for you because I wanted to see you on business of importance. I must have this whole game in my hands, 'Croft, so that I will know just how and where to turn. I begin to smell danger."

"You have got down off yer high horse, then, eh? Well, I am ready to talk, if I can be of any use to you."

"I didn't really blame you for saving that girl's life," remarked Paul, "but you did a mean thing by putting Sallie up to my trick."

"Your own trick wasn't mean; oh, no."

"Well, that is past now, and let's come to terms. I must have a clear understanding of this whole business, as I said, so that nothing can trip me up. Now in the first place have you told me the truth about that young postman? Is there no danger of his coming to life?"

"I have told you th' truth and nothin' else about that part of it. If you can tell me how he could get out of that hole, then he may come to life."

"Well, I guess that is safe enough. Now I want the names of the men who helped you. Also where they are to be found. I must see to it that they get out of the country immediately."

Hardcroft looked at him in surprise.

"Your head must be thick to-night," he observed. "Didn't I take you to see them, and didn't you talk with 'em?"

Paul passed his hand over his forehead.

"My head is thick," he owned. "My thoughts are all in a muddle. You will have to go over the whole ground with me, or I shall be off the

track. Now let's have the whole matter gone over at length, and then we shall see just how we stand."

"You have also forgot that you owe me a neat sum, too, haven't you?" Hardcroft demanded.

"No, I haven't forgot that."

"Well, how much was it? And when shall I have it?"

"If you help me to-night, and we come out all right, it shall be a clean thousand, and you shall have it to-morrow."

"A five hundred raise!" Hardcroft exclaimed. "You can count on me, every time. I shall hold you to it, though."

Paul had made a lucky hit. He had secured the fellow now, and it looked like all plain sailing ahead.

"It shall be yours," he said. "Now, you do the talking. Go right over the whole case, and I will try to get my head together while you do it."

Hardcroft did as requested, and in a little time Paul and his men had all of the secret that fellow could reveal to them.

"But you don't want to forget your appointment," Hardcroft reminded, when he had done.

"By Harry! I had forgotten it!" exclaimed Paul. "Where was it, anyhow?"

The rascal named a place and an hour.

"You will go with me, of course. To tell the truth, 'Croft, I have taken just a little more of the ardent than was good for me, and I am a trifle shaky on my pins."

"So I noticed. Yes, we'll go at once, as the hour is about up. Come on."

Paul turned the light down lower still, and they went out, the Postman Detective pretending to lock the door after them. The deception was being carried on perfectly.

"Where is the old man?" Hardcroft asked.

Paul gave a suitable answer, and they descended the stair and passed out upon the street. Four shadows silently followed them.

By skillful play Paul managed to let Hardcroft lead him, and when their destination was reached it was found to be a house not far from the saloon where Detective Harpers had come so near his death, and from which he and Paul had later escaped.

For a moment Paul hesitated, as he realized that he must enter the den alone, for he knew that his helpers could not follow him. The next instant his dauntless courage rose, however, and he followed Hardcroft boldly in.

There had been no lights seen in front, except a dim one at the door, but on entering that was explained. The front windows were tightly boarded up on the inside.

The large double parlor on the right of the hall was used as a saloon and gambling-den, and was brilliantly lighted.

Paul saw that he was in the lion's mouth, and there was no retreat. He had to go ahead and play the part as best he could.

"Hello! here's the Lieutenant," he heard some one exclaim, and all eyes were upon him.

He waved his hand in a familiar way, inclining his head a little, and led Hardcroft to the rear of the room. Some gave a second look at him, but for the most part they were all occupied, and for a little time he was left alone. He sat with his back to the crowd, and had put his feet up on a table.

"Who is here?" he asked of Hardcroft. "See any one we are interested in?"

Hardcroft looked and replied:

"Burke Wilton and Hugh Crompton are both here and—"

"Motion them this way," Paul requested.

Hardcroft did so, and the two rascals slouched forward to where he sat, the Prince greeting them when they came up.

"The job was a failure, boys," he said in a low tone.

"What!" exclaimed Burke, "did Harpers come to?"

"Not only that, but is likely to get well."

"Tb' dickens! Why, me an' Hugh could 'a' swore that he was finished. But—ha! got yer watch, eh?"

Paul had the watch and chain on.

"Yes, after hard work, and the risk of my life," he fibbed readily. "But, I want to know just how you handled that job. It seems to me there was a screw loose in it somewhere."

"Why, we have told you all about it an—"

"Yes, but I want you to tell me again. Go ahead."

One of the fellows did so, giving Paul the full account of the mysterious attack.

He had barely done when a young man entered the place, looked around in a careful manner, and came forward to where Paul sat.

Paul had partly turned so that he could watch the door, and at sight of this person he could not help a start. It was none other than Owen Chanley, the clerk in the office.

"Hello, Lieutenant," Chanley said, "I am late, I know, but could not help it. How is everything?" And he extended his hand as he spoke.

Paul greeted him, and they fell into a conversation, Hardcroft drawing away, feeling, perhaps from previous experience, that he was not wanted in their secrets.

Paul was sullen and talked but little, letting Chanley lead in everything, and he learned much. All the time he was watching the door. His men had not come, and he rightly guessed that they could not get in without using force.

Presently a waiter came to him, bearing a note. He said an answer was wanted. Paul took it and read:

"FRIEND LIEUTENANT:—
Four of us are here, and would like to get in.
Can you work it for us? JIM."

That was the name of one of his helpers.

"What's up?" inquired Chanley.

Paul handed the note over to him, remarking:

"A friend of mine from Philadelphia."

Turning to the waiter, he added: "It is all right; let them come right in. I stand for them."

The waiter went out, and in a moment more Paul's men were with him.

"Hello, Jim!" Paul exclaimed, when they came forward, "how is everything in Philadelphia?"

The cue was given, and the whole party were soon drinking wine to one another's health.

While they were so doing, Gerald Kempster came in. His face was flushed, and he was excited. Coming forward to where Paul sat, he glared at him an instant, and then cried out:

"Boys, here is a spy among you! The real Lieutenant has been arrested, and this fellow is playing in his place. Do not let him get away or give any alarm."

A bolt of lightning would not have surprised them more. But they had no time for reflection or action. Prince Paul was upon his feet instantly, a brace of big revolvers in his hands, and he shouted:

"Up with your hands, every mother's son of you! or there will be some lively dropping around here. Up with them, I say!"

Two other men with drawn weapons were at his side, while a third was at his back, covering the crowd that was in the other part of the room.

It was a terrible tableau.

In another instant a sharp whistle was heard in the hall, the doors were flung open, and a score of policemen rushed in.

It was a surprise complete and perfect, and the arrests followed without any trouble.

There were two who made a desperate effort to escape, but were foiled, and they were Chanley and Kempster. Hardcroft, too, tried to sneak out, but it was a vain effort, and in a very short time all that were wanted were securely handcuffed.

Turning all but Hardcroft over to the police, Paul and his men took that gentleman with them to a place where they could handle him as they would.

"Now, my rascal," Paul hissed, "I want to tell you who I am, and then I want some information out of you. I am Paul Boothman, the postman whom you tried to murder last night. Now I want to know the names of the men who helped you, and where they can be found."

At first the rascal would not tell, but when the men took hold of him and began to twist his arms, he howled with pain and gave in.

In a very few minutes Paul had all the points he wanted, and within half an hour every rascal who had been connected with the affair had been safely "jugged."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION AND RETROSPECTION.

No sooner had Prince Paul's work been accomplished than a reaction set in. His mind being freed from the terrible strain put upon it, and the danger and excitement over, he realized how tired and exhausted he was.

Turning everything over to his men, he went home.

Elna was there, and with her was Natalie Bakers, besides many other friends who had shared in the search for the missing girl.

The meeting between the brother and sister may be imagined. Old Mrs. MacGregor almost went wild over it, and, as soon as she had supplied Paul with a cup of good, strong tea, he had to tell the whole story from beginning to end.

Needless to say that he had attentive listeners. Time passed rapidly, and before they were aware of it they were into the small hours of the morning.

"It is just about what I thought, when I had time to think it all over," declared Mr. Bakers; "I had my eyes on Kempster and Chanley tonight, and I was sure there was something between them."

"Yes," agreed Paul, "they have both got their feet into it, half-way up to their necks, and I think it will go hard with them. Well, I shall give myself up to-morrow, and see what they can make out of the case against me."

In the forenoon of the next day he went to the office and made a surrender of himself, and was taken into custody.

He had nothing to fear, for he knew his innocence.

In the mean time the inspector had taken up

that case, and before night Paul was at liberty. The real thief had been found—rather the thieves. The registered letter had been taken by Kempster and Chanley, and they had planned to fasten a crime on Paul.

When the case came to trial it made a great sensation. A great story of well-conceived villainy was laid bare.

Most of the underhand working of the affair has been already made apparent to the reader. But it can be set forth in a few paragraphs.

The starting of the scheme had been the calling of Horatio Boothman upon Jabez Rogerton. Rogerton had immediately jumped to the plot of doing away with the real heirs, now that he knew, at last, who they were; and of putting forward false ones in their stead. He had consulted with his worthy son, Dunlap, and together they had made up their murderous plan of action.

It was Dunlap who had taken the leading part in the game. Learning all he was able to about Paul and Elna, he had put his wits to work, and the story we have given is the result. He knew Gerald Kempster and Owen Chanley, and took them into his confidence, to a certain degree. They were to be on the lookout for the letter from London, for Horatio Boothman, and when it came they were to let Dunlap know, so that he could have Paul waylaid. They did their part only too well, for it came very near costing the young postman his life.

At the same time they had a scheme of their own to advance. On that same night they took a registered letter, forged Paul's name to the receipt-book, and made it appear that he had stolen it. They knew that he would come in with a story that he had been robbed (they had no knowledge that the Rogertons meant to kill him), and then they would advance the theory that he had been his own robber. They had torn a leaf from his delivery-book to give weight to their story.

Their object was to win the hand of Natalie Bakers. They knew that, while Paul was at hand, they had no chance whatever, and so were determined to ruin his name.

But, there was double-dealing in that plot. Kempster loved her as madly as Chanley did, and it was his purpose, after he had helped Chanley to ruin Paul, to turn and do the same for Chanley, so as to have the whole field to himself!

But, rogues that they were, their plans failed all around, and they fell into their own trap.

Every point was brought out at the trials, and the Prince was applauded grandly. Old Secret Service experts complimented him, and his standing as a detective was assured. The inspector offered him a position, which he did not hesitate to accept, pending the coming of his fortune, and on the force he was thereafter known as the Postman Detective—the sobriquet Harpers had bestowed on his friend.

Every one of the rascals concerned was severely dealt with, and met their well-merited reward.

In due time the estate of old Adam Rogerton was settled, and Paul and Elna Boothman were rich. That they were happy need not be added. But, they were not selfish, and their riches made many a friend exceeding glad.

The Prince married Natalie Bakers, and, later on, there was another wedding when Elna became Mrs. Harpers.

Harpers and Paul had become inseparable friends, and when Harpers met Elna his fate was met at the same time—so far as Hymen had anything to do with it.

Horatio Boothman married Selina Peppertree, and poor Kripps the locksmith was left out in the cold. He took it very much to heart, for a time; but, finally, found a companion to cheer his declining years. This was a German woman about his own age, who not only gave him herself, but added four more children to his already large family!

Horatio and Selina were as happy as two children out of school, and Horatio could not help wondering why he had never seen things in that light before.

"Selina Peppertree," he would say, "why didn't you mention this thing years ago? It could have been settled then just as well as not. Smoke! but I have been living a mistake all these years and never knew it!"

It was some time before they could break themselves of their old and formal habits, and address each other in more endearing terms than "Selina Peppertree" and "Mr. Horatio," but they succeeded at last, and are happy.

Mr. Boothman still pursues the genealogical phantom, but, whether he will ever live to complete his work is doubtful. As he limits himself to just a few postage stamps per day, his progress is slow. There are many missing links yet to be found and put into place before the chain can be completed, and some of them he may never find.

Whether he makes a success of it or not, as a genealogical effort, it may be said that success has already crowned his efforts in the case of bringing fortunes to his dead brother's children.

Paul and Elna visit the happy couple occasionally, and Paul contemplates making him a

present of a great quantity of stamps and letting him have one real hard, hand-to-hand struggle with the genealogical ogre.

There are some minor points to be made clear before we drop the pen.

When the police and the postal-officers made their descent upon the saloon and house where the Prince and Harpers had had their narrow escape, they could find nothing of a tunnel such as Paul described to them. Why? The rascals who kept the places were prepared for just that emergency. They had a partition all ready to be put up in the room in the rear of the saloon at a moment's notice, and a floor to put under the stairway in the house, thus transforming it into a closet. Having coal, wood, and other things in that closet, made the trick a perfect success, while in the room back of the saloon, the partition looked as though it had always been there.

These points were brought out when the police made a second raid upon the dens.

The nocturnal marauder who had attempted the life of Horatio Boothman was none other than Jabez Rogerton, in person, as has been plainly intimated. That he will ever get another chance at the same work, is not likely. Strong walls surround him at present.

California Kate was present at the trial, and when it was over she set out again for the West. Who she was was never definitely ascertained. That she was a breezy character all had to admit.

Sallie Truffles—"Maud St. Clair"—was greatly troubled over her part in her lover's downfall, but she did not pine away and die. She married a man in her own line of business, and we will not stop to inquire whether they "lived happy ever after" or not.

THE END.

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